SKETCHES

FROM

SCRIPTURE HISTORY

BY THE LATE

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PREFATORY NOTICE.

The Papers, of which the following are a selection, were certainly not intended by the Author for publication, having been seen during his lifetime by only a few intimate friends, to one of whom chiefly, they had been originally addressed in a series of letters. For this reason, it would perhaps have been more consistent still to have allowed them to remain in privacy. In deference, however, to the opinion of several of those who possessed his confidence, and who conceived that they might be acceptable to his fellow-citizens, among whom he so long moved, a selection has been made of such as appeared best adapted for the press. The imperfections, which must always be inseparable from a posthumous work, will, in this instance, it is believed, find an apology in the circumstances above

explained, and in the fact of these papers having been composed during the intervals of responsible and laborious professional avocations. It must be superfluous to add, that the present publication has no view whatever to pecuniary advantage.

J. S.

EDINBURGH, 1st *March* 1846.

SKETCHES FROM SCRIPTURE HISTORY.

THE ROBE OF CHRIST.

In a psalm written by King David more than a thousand years before the birth of Christ—a psalm which has always been considered prophetical of the Saviour's sufferings, and which commences with the very words of deep agony which were uttered by him when hanging on the cross,—a circumstance is introduced as if intended to indicate the extremity of his distress:—"They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture."

The literal fulfilment of this prophecy is mentioned by all the evangelists. St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke, merely state the fact, that the soldiers, who attended at the Saviour's crucifixion,

"parted his garments, casting lots." St. John alone states *why* they did so. "Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: *now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout.* They said therefore among themselves, *let us not rend it,* but cast lots for it, whose it shall be," (St. John, xix. 23, 24.)

Although this extraordinary and exact fulfilment of an ancient prophecy, is the only reason professedly assigned for mentioning the circumstance here stated, some have thought that there is an emblematical meaning couched under the fact, that one of these garments, here called his coat, was *woven of one entire piece, without a seam.*

We are informed by Josephus,* that the High Priest of the Jews wore a garment of this very description. Now the Jewish High Priest was typical of Christ, and every thing respecting his vestments and ornaments had also some typical signification. We need not, therefore, be surprised, that his great antitype, the High Priest of our profession, wore, while on earth, a garment similar to that of his type or representative; and we may reasonably conclude, that this may also have borne some typical or emblematical meaning.

* Antiq. B. III., ch. 7, § 4.

What, then, shall we say, was the emblematical meaning, or mystery, shadowed forth under the form and texture of the Saviour's robe?

May not the texture of this robe—woven of one entire piece, without a seam—have been intended as an emblem of the uniformity, consistency, and close indissoluble connection, subsisting throughout every part of the Sacred Scriptures? Whether it have been so intended or not, the parallel between them, in these respects, holds in a remarkable degree: and if this is admitted, the question of intention is one of very inferior consequence; but some circumstances make it probable that this parallel is not altogether accidental.

The mere writings or compositions constituting the Holy Scriptures, expressed in human language, in accomodation to human weakness and ignorance, cannot of themselves be considered as the "Word" (or message) of God; but merely as the vehicle by which it is conveyed to the human understanding. Much of the language of Scripture is figurative, and the true meaning concealed under a variety of types, and dark metaphorical allusions. This was necessarily the case, for the things of heaven cannot be directly and literally expressed in the language of the earth. By a too literal interpretation of their own prophetical writings, the Jews failed of discovering their true scope and meaning, and their

minds are not opened to the genuine sense of them, even to this day.

The true "Word"—the real import and meaning of the Scriptures—the Spirit which animated the prophets, and which lives and breathes in their writings—is, we are told, "quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of the joints and the marrow." This cannot be said of the mere *letter* of the Scripture. "The letter killeth; the Spirit maketh alive."

Holding then the Scriptures taken as compositions—considered merely as a book, or a series of books—not to be themselves "the Word," but merely the *outward vehicle or covering* of the Word—the garb or clothing in which it is exhibited to man—perhaps it may be permitted us to imagine, that the vesture worn by the Saviour, the real living "Word made man,"—was formed as it was, as a sensible emblem or type of those sacred writings by which his mind and will are made known to the human race.

Let us consider the parallel a little farther. The robe, (or coat,) "was *without seam, woven from the top throughout.*"

And do not the Scriptures agree with this in a most remarkable degree? Though written by various hands—in distant ages and countries, and in different languages—the whole hang together with

a closeness and consistency in the substance and matter—an unity of purpose and object, which no other writings equally extensive possess, and such as to render them one entire and indivisible whole. There is no artificial joining of parts—nothing in their union that appears the result of human contrivance. The manner in which one part grows upon, and is united to another, more resembles the successive additions to, and growth of some productions of nature.

As the garment was "woven from the top throughout," we may trace this *oneness* and consistency of purpose, from the very commencement to the end of Scripture—from the first chapter of Genesis to the last of Revelation.

Throughout the Old Testament, history, law, and prophecy are so *interwoven* with one another, that there is no possibility of their being torn asunder. The first dark promise or prophecy of a Saviour, is given even in the words of the sentence pronounced on man at the Fall. The whole history of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is interspersed with a vein of prophecy. The call of the former patriarch to leave his people and his kindred, was connected with a prophecy, often renewed, that " in him, and in his seed, should all the families of the earth be blessed." A particular promise was afterwards given to him of a son, and another that his des-

cendants should possess the land in which he then dwelt as a stranger. The fulfilment of the first of these predictions, afforded an earnest and a pledge for that of the second, although this last was delayed for the long space of 400 years.

The intermediate history of these patriarchs and their descendants, in Canaan, in Egypt, and in Arabia Petrea, shewed them to be peculiarly under the protection of heaven. The great historical epoch of the Old Testament—the *Exodus*, or departure of the Israelites out of Egypt, accompanied with the most astonishing miracles,—their passage of the Red Sea, and long sojourn in the wilderness under the guidance of Moses—and their establishment in the promised land under Joshua, are constantly referred to as the peculiar work of God in their behalf. These facts are incorporated and intertwined, not merely with the history, but with the *laws*, the *poetry*, the religious *ceremonies*, and the civil *institutions* of this singular people, in such a way, that the memory of them could never by possibility be lost. No mere historical record could so effectually have accomplished this object. The institutions of the passover, and of the feast of unleavened bread, which were appointed to be observed annually by the whole nation for ever, were of themselves sufficient to perpetuate the remembrance of them. The Moral Law is introduced

with the declaration,—"I am the Lord thy God, which *brought thee out of the land of Egypt*, and out of the house of bondage." Many other laws contain similar allusions. Numerous laws command them to shew kindness to the poor, the fatherless, the widow and the stranger,—"*seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.*" They are constantly reminded of God having brought them out of Egypt, "with an high hand, and a stretched-out arm." They are reminded of this in all exhortations to obedience, and in all rebukes for their frequent contumacy and rebellion—on all occasions of greater or less importance, when addresses, admonitions, or reproofs were administered to them by their leaders. The references to these facts in the Pentateuch and other historical books, amount to several hundreds, so that they must have been indelibly imprinted, and we may say, *burnt in* upon the minds of the people, and so long as a shred of their sacred books remain, never by any possibility to be forgotten.

I need not attempt to trace particularly the history of the Jews after their establishment in Palestine, contained in the books of Judges, Ruth, the two books of Samuel, and the two books of Kings, bringing down our accounts of the nation, and of their transactions to the time of the Babylonish captivity. All the most important events during this long period, particularly in the reigns of the three first

and greatest of their kings, are related with a degree of minuteness and simplicity which render them exceedingly interesting. We then come to the two books of Chronicles, which form a kind of abridgement of the whole history of the chosen people,—accompanied with a series of genealogies—statements of the order and succession of the priests—abstracts of the division of the lands, among the different tribes and families, so precise and circumstantial, as to set all idea of forgery out of the question—*coinciding with*, and *confirming* the separate narration contained in the other historical books, with just such variations as might naturally arise from the mistakes and errors of transcribers.

The thread of history is continued in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which record the return of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin from Babylon—their re-establishment in Jerusalem, and the building of the second Temple.

The book of Esther relates an important event in the history of the nation, which took place during the captivity, the authenticity of which is proved by an institution connected with it, (the feast of Purim,) observed by the Jews to this day. Here is also inserted the book of Job, an ancient poem, relating the trials of an eminent servant of God;—his virtues in prosperity—his patience under severe affliction—his devout submission to the divine will, and

his final reward. Though, in point of historical connection, this book stands somewhat apart from the rest—in the sentiments and reflections which it records, and in the just and sublime views it gives of the greatness, power, and majesty of God, and his mode of dealing with his creatures, it bears the most undoubted marks of inspiration, and of an entire consistency with other parts of the sacred writings.

To this follow the Psalms, composed by King David and others—being the sacred poems and songs used in the public solemnities of the Jewish Church—rehearsed by the priests and Levites, with all the splendour of processions and dances,* and all the aids and resources of music, vocal and instrumental. These compositions stand, as it were, in the midst—between the proper historical and the purely prophetical parts of Scripture, and are indissolubly connected with both. Some of the psalms are themselves historical, others are prophetical; some are purely devotional, others didactic and moral. Some of them record in exalted strains the great deliverances which God in past times wrought for the nation, and the triumphs which he afforded them over their enemies,—" for his mercy endureth for ever." Others contain prophecies of their future destinies, and particularly of the advent, power, and greatness

* Exod. xv. 20. 2 Sam. vi. 14-16.

of the Messiah. With these are interspersed songs of praise and thanksgiving—earnest prayers for deliverance from danger and distress—fervent outpourings of the heart in affliction—joyful anticipations of good things to come, and expressions of confidence in the divine protection. The Psalms have been said to contain an epitome of the whole Bible, and a complete manual of devotion. In every variety of situation and circumstances—in every state and condition of mind, the devout worshipper may find here appropriate terms wherein to give vent and expression to his most ecstatic feelings. The ethical and didactic part of the Psalms is properly followed up by the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, composed by Solomon, " the wisest of mankind." The devotional and prophetical part finds an echo in the glowing imagery of the Canticles, the work of the same writer, bearing the impress of the warm and luxuriant imagination of the East. To these follow the more severe and oracular writings of the prophets—of Isaiah, whose predictions of the appearance, character, and offices of the Messiah, both in his state of humiliation and exaltation, seem, when compared with their fulfilment, almost like an anticipated history—of Jeremiah, sadly bewailing the sins and backslidings of his countrymen, and indicating the grievous punishment which awaited their continued disobedience—of Ezekiel, whose severe and scorch-

ing denunciations of wrath, announced the downfal of their state, and that of many other powerful nations — and of Daniel, who carried forward his view of the revolution of empires to the latest periods of the Roman power. To these are added the writings of the twelve minor prophets—*minor* as regards the length and number of their predictions, but in point of matter rising one above another in sublimity, and opening views of the future with advancing clearness, until in announcing the coming of the Messiah, one of them* states the very place where he was to be born, and another† describes the manner of his appearance, and that of the forerunner who is to "prepare his way;" and even specifies the very subjects on which that forerunner is to preach.

These writings are totally unlike any thing of human composition. The subjects of them are not separated by any marked divisions, or any apparent or correct method; but are thrown out with a rich and careless exuberance, and the whole woven together in one gorgeous web of prophecy. Denunciations of the wickedness and idolatry both of the Jews and of the neighbouring nations, followed up by the most awful threatenings of divine vengeance, are mixed every now and then with gleams of compassion and forbearance. Though the heathen idol-

* Micah v. 2. † Malachi iii. 1.— iv. 6.

aters seem to be devoted to irretrievable destruction, all the threatenings of wrath against Israel are delivered with the reservation, that, of that favoured people "a remnant should be saved." With these are every where mingled promises of a Saviour—"line upon line, line upon line,—here a little, and there a little;"—but delivered in a style so dark and enigmatical, that no one could before the event understand the nature of the mysterious Being they foretold. He is sometimes announced as a Prince and a Conqueror, accompanied by every circumstance of pomp and splendour, yet—he was to be "despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." He was to come "travelling in the greatness of his strength," yet—he was to be "brought to prison and to judgment." His "blood was to be poured out like water, and you might tell all his bones;" yet—he was to be "a King, and of his kingdom there was to be no end." Until Christ actually appeared, no one could possibly understand or conceive how these opposite, and apparently contradictory characters were to be united in one person—how all the individual traits could possibly unite to form one entire and beautifully harmonious portrait.

After the canon of the Old Testament was closed by Malachi, the spirit of prophecy seems to have lain dormant for four hundred years. It may be thought that there is here a division and a gap between the

Old Testament and the New, inasmuch as no work of undoubted inspiration appeared during all this long period. But it is not so. The interval was necessary to afford time for the fulfilment of various prophecies which required to be accomplished before the advent of the Messiah. The great empires of Assyria and Persia having been succeeded by that of Alexander, the dominions included in them were broken up into four kingdoms under the successors of that famous conqueror. These kingdoms being first undermined, were latterly overwhelmed by the resistless encroachments of the Roman power, all of which had been distinctly foretold in the prophecies of Daniel. Tyre—Moab—Egypt, and all the once flourishing kingdoms surrounding Judea, had gradually fallen under the sway of Rome; and Judea itself, long preserved apart from them all, was ready to become a prey to that insatiable power, when—in the fulness of time—just when "the sceptre was about to depart from Judah, and the lawgiver from between his feet,"—as had been foretold by the dying Israel nearly 1700 years before—the Saviour appeared.

The Saviour appeared,—outwardly, and to the view of men, in a low and humble condition, but to those who examine more closely, and see more truly, bearing the character and aspect of divinity. The numerous and apparently contradictory descriptions

of the Messiah contained in the prophecies, are taken up by the evangelists, and shewn in a manner the most simple, but, at the same time, the most clear and convincing, to be every one of them fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ—in his birth, his history, his miracles, his doctrines, his persecutions and sufferings, his trial and crucifixion, his resurrection and ascension. There is here, therefore, no want of continuity—no gap in the sacred record. The scattered fragments and separate threads of prophecy respecting the Messiah, contained in the Old Testament, are all gathered up and arranged; and however of themselves they may appear disjointed and unconnected, yet when woven together with the wool of the New Testament, they appear before us as one harmonious whole. We then see the design and the meaning of what was before dark and mysterious; and the entire scheme rises distinctly into view, in the narratives contained in the four Gospels, as the figures rise upon a piece of tapestry under the hands of the workman. In this manner, it is obvious to every one who considers the subject, that no two parts of the Sacred Writings are more completely incorporated, or more indissolubly united and interwoven together, than the *prophetical* parts of the Old, and the *historical* parts of the New Testament.

The Acts of the Apostles, written by St. Luke, is professedly a continuation of the Gospel of that

evangelist; but it serves as a continuation of all the four—containing a history of the infant Church under the ministry of the immediate followers of our Lord. While the life of the Saviour himself—the most unspeakably important and vitally essential part of Scripture history—is recorded by no fewer than four inspired writers of the highest class, one of these has been deemed sufficient to relate the acts of his followers; these being proportionally of less absorbing interest, as the acts and sayings of the servants are necessarily less important than those of their Lord.

The Epistles are letters, or written discourses, addressed by certain of the Apostles to the churches which they had established in different countries, for the purpose of confirming them in the faith, and for the instruction of believers in all ages. These Epistles, particularly those of St. Paul, *are connected* with the book of the Acts, by a great number of minute circumstances and coincidences—some of them apparently of the most artless and undesigned description—affording an irresistible argument for the authenticity and genuineness of both the letters and the history:* but they are also connected with the Gospels in a different and much more intimate sense, by their substance and matter. They are, in fact, just an *inspired commentary on the Gospels*—

* Vide Horæ Paulinæ, by the late Dr. Paley.

explaining and enforcing the more important doctrines taught by our Saviour, and refuting various errors and heresies which even then had begun to arise in the Church. Some of them are principally directed to prove the infinite importance of *faith*, as the grand vital principle on which all religion rests, and the foundation on which all subsequent attainments in holiness must be built. Other parts insist in a more special manner on the necessity of *good works*, and purity of life and conduct; while a third proves in the most convincing manner the entire harmony between these two grand essentials of Christianity, shewing that no faith can be genuine which does not approve its sincerity by corresponding holiness of life, and that there can be no true holiness but what originates in a sincere and lively faith.

The Epistle of St. Paul to the Hebrews must especially be noticed, as completing the connection between the Old and the New Testaments; proving to the Jews, by a reference to their own Scriptures, in which they believed they had eternal life, that they did, indeed, testify of Jesus. The Apostle proves this, not merely by a reference to direct prophecies, but by what to the Jews would appear an equally cogent argument—an application of the types and mysteries contained in their ceremonial and sacrificial law—the garments and ornaments of their priests, and the sacred vessels in the Tabernacle and

Temple; all which he shews to have been merely the "shadows of good things to come." Here we have another series of connections between the old dispensation and the new, between the first dark revelation made to the fathers, and the last and clearest light of divine truth vouchsafed to the children.

Lastly, and to sum up all—the vision of the Apocalypse comes in as an appropriate conclusion to the Sacred Canon. It commences with a series of admonitions addressed by the "Spirit" to the seven Churches of Asia, established by the immediate Apostles of our Lord—commenting on their several characters and conditions—holding up to them, as it were, a glass in which they might see their deformities and faults, and predicting their ruin, unless these were amended. The remainder of the book is taken up with a succession of sublime and mysterious prophecies respecting the state of the Church in after times, whereof we can at present understand little of the details, but whereof the general scope is nevertheless highly encouraging to believers. From these prophecies it appears, that though the religion of Jesus is to meet with much opposition in the world, and is itself to be polluted by many corruptions, it is destined to be restored to its pristine purity—to triumph over all opposition, and finally to be spread over all the earth; and that after many a struggle the reign of Satan is to be destroyed, and that of Christ

and his saints established on a lasting foundation. The most splendid descriptions are given of the glory of the Church in the last days, under the figure of the New Jerusalem, the Lamb's wife, which is represented as descending from heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. The river and the tree of life are also described in the most gorgeous colours. A blessing is promised to all who do the commandments of the Lord. An invitation is given to every one who will, to drink of the water of life, (the word of God,) and a curse is pronounced on all who add to, or take from the words of the book of this prophecy: and the whole concludes by invoking upon all, "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ."

The above is a short, and very imperfect view of the connections subsisting between the different parts of the Sacred Scriptures—connections so close and intimate, that no one part can be properly understood apart, and disjoined from the rest. Like the robe for which the Roman soldiers cast lots, we must never attempt to rend it. We must take it as it is—as a whole: but in this respect we are more favoured than they, that every believer may appropriate the whole of it, in all its richness and sufficiency to himself; and his doing so does not in the least prevent its proving equally rich and efficacious to the whole number of the faithful throughout the world to the end of time.

THE INCARNATION.

Seven hundred years before the birth of our Saviour, it was foretold by the Prophet Isaiah to King Ahaz, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel, God with us." This prophecy was always understood by the Jews to relate to the Messiah, and to intimate that he should be born of a virgin; and, accordingly—in the fulness of time—Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, *was* born of a virgin in the city of Bethlehem of Judea.

But this is only a part of the prophecy. The remaining, and the most important part intimated, that the Son, who should be thus born of a virgin, was to possess all the characters of the divine nature. He was to be called, (that is, he was to be,) "God dwelling among men."

These were prophecies of the most important nature, and on the evidence of their fulfilment must

depend the whole claims of the Christian religion to our belief and acceptance. It was peculiarly necessary, therefore, that the proofs of that fulfilment should be perfectly clear, that there should be no mistake or dubiety respecting any part of the evidence.

On consulting the Sacred Record, we find the evidence in support of these facts of the fullest and most satisfactory nature. No part of the sacred narrative is vouched by a more undoubted body of testimony; nor is any species of testimony awanting which it is possible to adduce in support of any fact whatever.

The prophecy is twofold; and the evidence of its fulfilment is also twofold. The evidence which proves the virginity of the mother, proves at the same time the divinity of the Son.

We have elsewhere stated, that the narrative given by St. Luke of the appearance of the angel Gabriel to Mary, commonly called the Annunciation, could only have been derived from Mary herself, as no other human being was cognizant of what occurred upon that occasion. Keeping this in view, let us consider the narrative itself, which is at once simple, natural, and circumstantial.

"And in the sixth month," (that is, the sixth month after the vision of Zacharias and the conception of Elisabeth,) "the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth,

"To a virgin espoused to a man, whose name was

Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

"And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women.

"And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.

"And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary; for thou hast found favour with God.

"And behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a Son, and shalt call his name *Jesus*.

"He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David.

"And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end."

We may easily conceive the tumult of various feelings which would be raised in the bosom of Mary at this announcement by the angel. The very appearance of the heavenly visitant would naturally produce awe and astonishment, which would be increased by the unusual nature of his salutation; and, accordingly, we are told "she was troubled at his saying." But the latter part of his communication—importing no less than that she was chosen by God to be the mother of the Messiah—must have raised these feelings to their highest pitch, and excited at

once emotions of joy, hope, fear, and wonder, in a degree that could hardly ever have been experienced by any other human being.

The next words uttered by Mary bring the whole circumstances clearly into view, and afford at once an insight into what was passing in her mind, and a proof of the purity and simplicity of her character.

"Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?"

These words would never have been recorded if they had not been uttered; and assuming that they were uttered, they lead irresistibly to the conviction, that Mary was truly described in the preceding verses, and that she was really a pure and unspotted virgin. Nothing could be more natural than the words, *the fact being so.* Had it been otherwise—had Mary been conscious in this particular of the smallest stain—she durst as soon have swallowed poison, or plunged into the midst of a fiery furnace, as have uttered them in the presence where she now stood. It would, on such a supposition, have been a lie—a lie not to man, but to God:—and she could have expected nothing but to be struck dead, as Sapphira was, with the lie upon her lips.

But Mary was unconscious of blame, or of falsehood. She had merely given utterance to her thoughts in the simplicity of her heart. She probably reflected on the peculiar situation in which

she was placed, as an affianced bride, not yet brought home to the house of her husband; and that she did not yet understand that the son she was to bear was to have no human father. But the answer of the angel soon dispelled all her doubts.

"And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."

As a confirming sign, to prove that what was now promised should be certainly fulfilled, the angel refers to the fact of her cousin Elisabeth having been made to conceive a son when past the age of child-bearing.

"And behold thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren.

"For with God nothing shall be impossible."

Mary's doubts and fears are now entirely removed, and she at once expresses her consent, her humility, her faith, and her rejoicing in the gracious purpose of God.*

"And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word."

It is supposed by commentators, and there ap-

* Dean Stanhope.

pears reason in the supposition, that at the instant of this act of faith and purposed obedience, the conception of the immaculate humanity of Jesus took place, and that it was done unto the virgin according to the word of the angel, who at that moment departed from her.

We are then told, that Mary "arose in those days, and went into the hill-country with haste, into a city of Juda, and entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth."

Mary was probably moved to undertake this sudden journey, from a desire to be more fully informed of the truth of what had been told her by the angel respecting Elisabeth. She no doubt was led to this by the Holy Spirit, both for the confirmation of her own faith, and for affording to Christians in all ages a strong additional evidence of the reality of those things which had been revealed to her concerning herself.

"And it came to pass, that when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb, and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost.

"And she spake out with a loud voice and said, Blessed art thou among women,"—the very words used by the angel,—"and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.

"And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me."

It seems clear from these verses, that no previous communication had been made by Mary to Elisabeth. There had been no time for any such. Immediately after the "annunciation," Mary set out on her journey to the hill-country, "with haste," to visit Elisabeth; and the instant of her arrival—without a single word of explanation—the latter seems to have been informed by the direct inspiration of the Holy Ghost, that Mary who now saluted her, was about to become "the mother of her Lord."

The sequel of Elisabeth's address contained matter of the highest encouragement to Mary.

"For lo! as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.

"And blessed is she that believed; for there *shall* be a performance of these things which were told her from the Lord."

Mary's faith, hope, and joy are now raised to their highest pitch. All her doubts and fears have vanished, and she breaks out into a rapturous hymn of thanksgiving and praise. This hymn, (which is commonly called the "Magnificat," and is still used in the public service of several Churches,) is full of sentiments of the purest devotion, the most unaffected humility, and the most exalted patriotism. The thanksgiving for herself is expressed with

the meekness and gentleness which was agreeable to her character; but her warmest aspirations are reserved for the loftier theme, that God had now "holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, (as he spake to our fathers,) to Abraham and to his seed for ever."

Mary, we are told, abode with Elisabeth about three months, and returned to her own house. After this, her situation could not be much longer concealed; and, in particular, it became necessary that the whole truth should be disclosed to Joseph, her affianced husband.

Here, it may be asked, why was Mary, by the arrangements of Providence, placed in this embarrassing situation? If the Saviour was to be born of a virgin, where was the necessity, or where was the use, that she should be previously espoused to an husband? The answer involves several important considerations. It did not suit the divine purposes that the miraculous events, which were now in the course of being accomplished, should at this time be openly published to the world; and, therefore, it was not only fit but necessary, that Mary should be invested with the character of a married woman. This was necessary, not merely to protect her from the censures of gossiping neighbours, but for the more important purpose of checking a vain curiosity, and preventing their inquiries,

which must have led to a premature disclosure of that which it was the purpose of God to keep secret for a time. Farther, the providing of a husband to Mary and of a reputed father to her child, as it afterwards appeared, was necessary even for the preservation of their lives. But for his assistance how could the child have been saved from the murderous designs of Herod? How could an unprotected female, with a helpless infant, have accomplished such a journey as is implied in the flight into Egypt, and their subsequent return from that country?

But, besides all this, the circumstance of Mary having been espoused to Joseph, previous to the miraculous conception, was attended with the advantage of providing an additional witness to the wonderful fact itself, and of strengthening, in a very great degree, the evidence we possess for the truth of that fact. By the laws of evidence which prevail generally in all civilized countries, in matters of the highest importance, such as a trial for life and death, two witnesses are required to prove every material fact—and two are considered sufficient for that purpose. Accordingly, here, two witnesses have been provided, whose evidence completely corroborates each other—to prove the most important fact that ever was promulgated to the world.

The evidence of Mary, bearing, though it does, all the marks of simplicity and truth, might have

been liable, had it stood alone, to the exception of her being an interested party. But in the case of Joseph, the presumption is all the other way. He had no interest, and could have no desire to give an undue colour to the transaction, or to represent it otherwise than as it really appeared to him. Instead of wishing to screen what he must, in the first instance, have considered the lamentable frailty of his betrothed wife, his regard to his own reputation as a man, and the honour of a husband, required, that he should remove from himself all suspicion of conniving at her supposed guilt; and this is precisely what he appears to have meditated, until a heavenly messenger was sent to apprize him of the truth.

St. Matthew who, as we have elsewhere stated, appears to have derived his information from Joseph, (without taking any notice of the circumstances narrated by Luke, apparently on the authority of Mary,) merely says, that "When as the mother of Jesus was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost."*

This was no doubt true; but Joseph could, at first, know nothing but the mere fact of her being with child. What passed between them on the subject we know not. Whether he made any inquiry, or received from her any detailed statement

* Matt. i. 18.

of the circumstances, is not mentioned, though it is extremely likely that such would be the case. But the explanation, if given, does not appear to have proved satisfactory, as the evangelist proceeds to state,—"Then Joseph, her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a *public* example, was minded to put her away privily."

Commentators have explained this to mean, that Joseph being a good man—humane as well as just —was not willing to bring his wife to a public trial for an offence, the punishment of which, by the Jewish law, was death by stoning. But there may have been other motives. As it is probable that Mary had stated to him, without disguise, the extraordinary and miraculous events which had occurred, although he could not at first, on her bare assertion, give implicit credit to a story so wonderful, he might still have a misgiving in his own mind, that after all, it might possibly be true. Were it to turn out so, he might be afraid, that by giving her up to the arm of the law, he might be guilty of a grievous crime, by exposing to outrage an innocent being, destined by God to the highest honour—even that of giving birth to the Messiah. If the matter be considered in this light, we will see that the course contemplated by Joseph, in the state of uncertainty he was then in, was not only the most consistent with justice, but almost the only one he could

follow with propriety, or by which he might escape from the dilemma in which he found himself placed. But his purpose was changed, and in the following manner:—

"But while he thought on these things, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, —Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

"And she shall bring forth *a son*, and thou shalt call his name *Jesus*; for he shall save his people from their sins."

This dream, or vision, at once removed every doubt or scruple from the mind of Joseph. It corresponded with, and confirmed every particular in the statement of Mary—that that which was conceived in her was *of the Holy Ghost*—that she should bring forth *a son*, and that they should call his name *Jesus.*

All this had been previously announced to Mary, when the angel appeared to her.

The promises made to Mary, respecting the son she was to bear were, that he was to be called the Son of the Highest—that God should give him the throne of his father David, and that he should reign over the house of Jacob for ever; but to Joseph the words of the angel were, that he should save his people from their sins. Though these are appar-

ently different characters, they were both characters attributed to the expected Messiah, and neither of them could leave any doubt on the mind of either Joseph or Mary, that the son thus promised to the latter was to be that Messiah.

We have here presented to us, not merely the testimony of Joseph as to the revelation made to to him—confirming, in every point, that previously vouchsafed to Mary—but we have the still stronger evidence, arising from the fact of a change being produced in his purposes and intentions. He now no longer thought of putting away his betrothed wife. Convinced, at once—not by mere human testimony—not by any process of reason, but by a direct revelation from heaven—of Mary's entire innocence, and that the whole matter was from God —he, without a moment's hesitation, took her home to his house.

"Then Joseph being raised from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife.

"And knew her not, till she had brought forth her first-born son; and he called his name *Jesus*."

We have here supplied the only fact necessary to prove that Mary remained a virgin till *after* the birth of the Saviour. This was necessary for the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy, that the virgin should not only *conceive*, but *bear* a son. But after this, it

was neither necessary nor proper that Mary, being united to a just and honourable man in the holy bond of marriage, should not live from thenceforth in the same state of chaste and blameless intercourse with her husband, as other married women. Some commentators have spent much useless labour, in endeavouring to prove that Mary remained a virgin during the whole of her life; but there is not only no good reason, but actually no reason at all for supposing that this was the case. On the contrary, all the intimations in Scripture which bear upon the subject, prove, as far as anything can prove, the reverse. After our Lord had commenced his public ministry, we are told by St. Matthew,* that "while he yet talked to the people, behold his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him." Again, we are told by the same evangelist, that when he came into his own country, the people would not believe in him, saying, "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary; and his brethern James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us?"†

There is no reason to suppose that his brethren and his sisters, were any other than the sons and daughters of Joseph and Mary. We are not told, and the known circumstances seem to exclude the

* Matt. xii. 46. † Matt. xiii. 55, 56.

supposition, that Joseph ever had any other wife. The only reasonable supposition is, that after the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary lived together in the honourable estate of matrimony, as other married persons, "in conjugal affection, unreproved;" and that they were blessed with a numerous family, which, in all eastern countries, and particularly in Judea, was always considered as the greatest of all blessings. To imagine the contrary, would be to admit the impossible supposition, that God intended by their example to throw discredit on that ordinance, established by himself for the peopling of the world, and to recommend a violence to nature, separating those whom he himself had declared to be indissolubly joined. It would be doing what was afterwards attempted by some of the primitive Christians, and latterly by the Church of Rome,—introducing that which was the cause of many corruptions in these Churches, under cover of a false and fantastic purity, and an unattained and unattainable perfection.

We have now gone over all that is recorded respecting the literal fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy, —of the immaculate conception of the virgin, and the divinity of the Saviour, so far as these two facts are proved, by the same evidence. Of the latter, the divine nature of Christ, there are proofs innumerable and irrefragable contained in other parts of

Scripture; but the evidence of the former fact, lies principally, if not exclusively, in the passages we have now cited from St. Matthew and St. Luke; and these, it is submitted, form a chain of proof of the most cogent and irresistible kind.

In the first place, we have the evidence of Joseph and Mary, the only human beings who were personally cognizant of the facts, supporting and confirming each other in the minutest particular.

To render this proof the stronger, the evidence of these two witnesses comes to us through different channels—St. Matthew detailing the circumstances which fell more immediately under the personal cognizance of Joseph, and St. Luke relating those parts of the story, of which Mary was the only competent witness.

Holding the evidence of these two witnesses, so corroborated and so recorded, as above all suspicion, we have secondly, through them, the evidence of two angelic witnesses—the angel Gabriel, who appeared to Mary at the Annunciation, and the angel who appeared to Joseph in a dream, certifying to him the truth of the statement given by Mary.

Besides this direct evidence, we have that afforded by a train of minute circumstances related along with the principal facts—circumstances which it never would have occurred to any one to imagine, unless they had actually occurred, but which, related as

they are with the utmost simplicity and plainness, strike us irresistibly as bearing the genuine impress of truth.

To the above evidence, human and angelic, direct and circumstantial, we have to add the authority of two historians of unimpeached veracity,—both confessedly inspired—both relating what they knew with the most perfect sincerity and good faith—and both preserved from error by the immediate influence of the Spirit of all truth.

Having, therefore, every kind of evidence, human, angelic, and divine, for the truth of the facts which lie at the foundation of our faith, what remains for us, but like Mary, to keep all these sayings in our heart, and to hold them fast as the anchor of our salvation?

THE NATIVITY.

Though it be certain, that "all Holy Scriptures are written for our learning," there are nevertheless some parts of them which are calculated more than others to strike the imagination, warm the hearts, and kindle the admiration of believers. Of this nature are the numerous pieces of a poetical character, scattered up and down the whole of Scripture, like gems inclosed in a setting of the precious metals, (or as Solomon expresses it, "like apples of gold set in pictures of silver,") many of which occur in books the general texture of which is not poetical. Many beautiful morsels of this kind are to be found in the writings of St. Luke, a specimen of which may be seen in that delightful idyl, where he describes the announcement of the nativity to the shepherds of Bethlehem.

It may assist in enabling us, not merely to point out the beauties, but absolutely to understand the

meaning of this interesting passage, if we exhibit to the eye the parallel arrangement of the composition which distinguishes every variety of sacred poetry, and which may be done without altering a single word of our authorized translation.

> "And there were shepherds, abiding in the field,
> Keeping watch over their flocks by night.
> And suddenly
> The angel of the Lord came upon them,
> And the glory of the Lord shone round about them;
> And they were sore afraid.
> And the angel said—'Fear not:
> Behold I bring you glad tidings of great joy,
> Which shall be to all people;
> For to you is born, this day,
> In the city of David,
> A Saviour, which is Christ,
> The Lord.
> And this shall be a sign unto you:
> Ye shall find the child wrapped in swaddling clothes,
> And laid in a manger.
> And suddenly, there was with the angel
> A multitude of the heavenly host,
> Praising God, and saying—
> Glory to God
> In the highest;
> And on earth, Peace,
> Good-will to men."

There is throughout the whole of this passage—not merely as a piece of composition, but consi-

dered in relation to the transaction which it describes—something that is above the mere imaginations of men, and which bears the marks of coming from Him whose ways and thoughts are not as our's. The whole scene is superlatively grand; and yet altogether different from what any human being even of the highest genius could have conceived. Above all, it differs from what would have occurred to the imagination of a Jew, as much as light differs from darkness.

The Jews expected in their Messiah an earthly prince, the splendour of whose reign was to eclipse the far-famed glories of Solomon, who should raise their nation far above its former greatness, and place all the kings of the earth under their feet.

It would be natural for them to expect, that the birth of this mighty Conqueror would be proclaimed in the midst of the Holy City, with every circumstance of triumphal pomp; that the long lost Shekinah would again descend and fill the magnificent courts of the Temple; and that a voice would come forth from the excellent glory to announce to the chosen people the advent of their King.

In a far different manner, however, was this announcement made; not to the assembled multitude—not to the bigotted chief priests or the self-righteous Pharisees—not to the great in vulgar estimation, or amidst the glare of ceremony, or the pomp of sacrifice—but to the humble and lowly shepherds, in the

retirement of the fields, and in the stillness of the night.

There is a meaning and a propriety in every circumstance here described.

It was announced to *shepherds*,—that He was born who was to be the great Shepherd of Israel—the good Shepherd, who was to lay down his life for his sheep.

It was announced to them when abiding in the *field*,—not confined in houses of man's construction, —with no seat but the verdant turf, no canopy but the starry heavens.

They were *keeping watch.* It is they who *keep watch* to whom the messages of the promise are sent. Blessed are they whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching.

They were keeping watch over *their flocks*; but the lost sheep of the house of Israel were wandering without a shepherd. The Scribes and Pharisees sat in Moses' seat, but they were blind leaders of the blind.

It was night. The natural night was emblematic of that moral darkness which covered even the chosen land, and of that thicker gloom, approaching to the shadow of death, which enveloped the benighted heathen nations—

> "When suddenly
> The angel of the Lord came upon them,
> And the glory of the Lord shone round about them."

In these few words are conveyed as forcible an idea as language can express, of the glorious vision that now saluted the eyes of the shepherds.

The celestial visitant was not merely attended with a light that rendered him distinctly visible, but with an emanation of brightness illuminating the whole surrounding scenery. The words "glory of the Lord," would indicate an excessive degree of splendour, far surpassing that of the sun at noon-day.

This also has its meaning. Every thing connected with the Gospel now to be announced, is not only enlightened, but enlightening—not merely clearly and distinctly visible in itself, but throwing a radiance and a glory on all that comes within the sphere of its influence.

No wonder that a vision so sudden and so extraordinary, should at first cause an overwhelming feeling of astonishment and fear in the minds of the shepherds. We have no laboured description of this feeling. The simple words of the Evangelist are more expressive than the most laboured eloquence—

"They were *sore afraid*."

But they are soon re-assured by the words of the angel—

"*Fear not.*"

It has been observed, that in the Hebrew idiom, which prevails even throughout the Greek New Testament, the strongest mode of expressing any thing, is by a negative. The angel does not say, "be calm—be composed—be of good courage." The words, "fear not," are stronger than any such positive form of expression, being equivalent to bidding them cast off every shadow of fear or disquietude. "Instead of fear, the news I bring are fitted to inspire the most lively emotions of gladness."

We may here remark, that all the celestial messengers intrusted with the task of announcing to men the near approach of the Saviour, used the same encouraging words to those whom they addressed. When the angel Gabriel appeared in the temple to Zacharias, the first words he uttered were, "Fear not, Zacharias." When the angel appeared to Mary, and announced to her that she was destined to the high honour of being the mother of our Lord, his first words to her were, "Fear not, Mary." And now—when the moment of his nativity has arrived, and the angel of the Lord is about to announce the joyful event—the first words of his message are the same, "Fear not,"—

"Behold I bring you glad tidings."

This itself is a strong expression, and fitted to

raise high expectation : but observe how its force is increased by what follows.

It is not common, "glad tidings," that the angel announces, but "*glad tidings* of *great joy*,"—glad tidings fitted to fill the minds of the hearers with the most intense delight. I bring these tidings *to you* ; but they are not for you only, but for "*all people* ;"—not addressed to them or the nation of the Jews alone, but to all the dwellers upon earth ;—not alone to the present existing race, but to all future generations who shall live upon earth to the end of time.

The tidings of the Gospel are first felt to be *glad tidings*, by bringing peace and joy to the believer himself—then by their extending around to the whole visible Church—lastly, by embracing all generations of men, born or unborn. Thus the prophet speaks when foretelling the "fulness of the Gentiles." "Sing, O heaven that didst not hear ; break forth into singing and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child. For more are the children of the desolate, (the heathen,) than of the married woman, (Judea,) saith the Lord. Enlarge the place of thy tent ; and let them stretch forth the curtains of thy habitations : spare not, lengthen the cords, and strengthen the stakes ; for thou shalt break forth on the right hand, and on the left ; and thy seed shall

inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited."

It is then that the joy of the believer is full, when he beholds with the eye of faith the whole family of God,—that great multitude which no man can number, out of every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, the general assembly and church of the *first-born*, (that is of Christ,) whose names are written in heaven.

> "For *to you is born*,—*this day*,—in the *City of David*,
> *A Saviour*,—which *is Christ*,—*the Lord*."

Here, again, the expressions rise one above another, in force and depth of meaning.

The Saviour *is born*. This is not announced, as it was to the patriarchs and prophets of old, as an event to take place in distant future ages. It was glad tidings even to them, who "saw the day" of the Messiah afar off. But the event is now announced as having actually taken place—now,—*this very night*.

Nor has this great event occurred in a distant country, or among another people, (as it was announced to the wise men of the East,) but *here*—close at hand—in *this your city* of Bethlehem.

The Saviour—the promised Messiah—the desire of all nations—the object of all prophecy—is come.

Who is that Saviour? Christ, the Son of the living God. Who shall declare his generation? Who shall recite his titles or his names? It is "the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in mercy and in truth, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin." His character and offices are only fittingly described in the words of the prophet—

> "Unto us a child is born,
> Unto us a Son is given,
> And the government shall be upon his shoulder;
> And his name shall be called
> ——— Wonderful,
> ——— Counsellor;
> ——— The mighty God;
> ——— The everlasting Father;
> ——— The Prince of Peace.

Where is this Saviour, this mighty one, to be found? What circumstances of pomp attend his coming?

As if to crush for ever all emotions of earth-born pride—as if to serve as a standing, an eternal proof of the utter insignificance and worthlessness of all outward grandeur—the Saviour appears on earth in a form the most weak and lowly, a child—in external circumstances apparently the most destitute and

wretched, deprived even of the ordinary comforts of a home—

> "Wrapped in swaddling clothes,
> And laid in a manger."

There is something here more astonishing to the pride and the prejudices of man, than anything which the imagination of man is able to fathom or to conceive. Such an amazing contrast between the apparent and the real, never was before or since, manifested to the world.

But if this last announcement was calculated to shake the faith and confound the expectations of the shepherds, their wavering and troubled thoughts would at once be set at rest, and their whole minds swallowed up in an intense feeling of wonder and joy ;—when a new scene opened which shewed the mighty event that had taken place in its true aspect and importance—

> "And suddenly, there was with the angel
> A multitude of the heavenly host,
> Praising God."

Never since the time when the angels of God met the Father of the Jewish nation at Mahanaim,—or that more memorable occasion, when the same patriarch saw in a vision, a ladder stretched from heaven to earth, and these divine messengers as-

cending and descending upon it—did such a glorious spectacle manifest itself to men.

The veil is lifted for once—and for an instant mortal eyes are permitted to look into the outer courts of heaven's eternal King. A part of the heavenly host—a small part, yet a multitude—are seen engaged in the employment most fitted for celestial beings;—praising God.

Never surely was mortal hearing enriched with such a tide of harmony, as that which now saluted the ears of the shepherds of Bethlehem.

Compared with this, what were the loftiest strains of earthly music?

The subject—the occasion—and the performers—are all of heaven.

It is heaven descending to earth, and drawing earth upwards to itself.

It is no earthly poet that speaks:—Listen to the song of the angels!

> "Glory to God,
> Glory in the highest heavens;
> And on earth, peace,
> Good will to men."

Every word is fraught with meaning, deep and large. Glory is ascribed to God—not confined to the narrow bounds of earth, but extended to the infinite regions of heaven, even the highest heaven.

What is the subject, and what the occasion, on which this glory is here described to be founded? Because the rebel, man, is to be pardoned. Good will from an offended God is to be extended to him, and as a consequence of this, peace is proclaimed on earth, and all hostile feelings of man towards man are to cease.

The above contains a very faint exposition of the feelings and thoughts suggested by this beautiful and affecting portion of sacred writ; and but a small part of these, for the subject reaches into an unlimited field, and the objects which it embraces are altogether boundless.

It is fitting to stop with this feeble outline—the pious reader will fill it up with devout and fervent meditation.

When the mind is thoroughly awakened to their beauty, the simple words of the inspired penman will be felt to possess a charm which no laboured commentary or flowery paraphrase can heighten, or come up to; and we feel that there are in the words of Divine inspiration, a height, and a depth, and a length, and a breadth of meaning and of power, infinitely surpassing all that can be shewn in the most sublime strains of human poesy.

OUR LORD'S EARLY HISTORY.

The four authentic histories which contain the record of the life of our Saviour on earth, rest, in the first place, as all histories do, on human testimony. It might have pleased the Almighty to have revealed the whole to one individual, who might have been commissioned to deliver it to the world in the inspired words of infallible truth, which would have at once rendered all resort to historical evidence unnecessary. But this is not the method that has been followed. It has seemed more expedient to Divine Wisdom to commit the important duty to four properly qualified persons—men of undoubted veracity and irreproachable character—guided no doubt by the Spirit in the choice and use of their materials, but leaving them to gather these materials themselves in the same manner as is done by other historians—from their own observation—from written docu-

ments—or from the evidence of credible eye and ear witnesses.

From the histories themselves, and other collateral information, we are sufficiently certified of the nature of the evidence on which they rest. Two of the historians were among the immediate disciples of our Lord, who attended him during the whole of his public ministry, and were themselves the witnesses of what they recorded to have taken place during that important period. Mark is known to have been the friend and companion of St. Peter, the first called of the Apostles, from whom he had ample opportunities of deriving information, and who is generally understood to have revised, at least, if he did not directly dictate, those parts of the narrative of which he had the best means of knowing the truth. St. Luke, in like manner, was the companion of St. Paul, and is understood to have written his Gospel, as well as the Acts of the Apostles, under his immediate inspection; and though neither of them were personal attendants of our Lord, yet Luke states, that "he had perfect understanding of all things from the very first," and that, therefore, he had undertaken, as others had done, to set in order "a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us." Though he may not have been himself an eye-witness of our Saviour's miracles, or a hearer of his discourses, his intercourse with the

Apostles, and others who were witnesses of these, must have been abundantly sufficient to qualify him for the task of committing them to writing.

Two of the evangelists, St. Mark and St. John, confine their history to the period of our Lord's public ministry; but St. Matthew and St. Luke, in addition to this, embrace in their narratives various circumstances preceding and attendant upon his birth, and some facts in the private life of himself and his parents, before the time of his shewing himself to Israel. It may be asked, from whom did they derive their information for this part of their history? The answer which naturally occurs to us is this—that these facts could only have been communicated by the parents themselves, his mother, and his reputed father, to whom only they were known, and who were the only witnesses who could give evidence respecting them. We shall examine this more particularly.

On perusing the opening part of the Gospel of St. Matthew, we cannot fail to be impressed with the belief, that most of the information there contained must have been derived in some way or another from Joseph, the reputed father of our Lord. In the first place, commentators are generally agreed, that the genealogy with which the first chapter commences is that of Joseph, and that its

design was to shew that Christ was in his right the heir of the throne of David. It is known that these genealogies were kept and preserved with the greatest care by the Jews, particularly those who like Joseph were of the family and lineage of David. It is natural, therefore, to suppose, that this genealogy was obtained from him; but there are other circumstances still more decisive. For instance, we are told that when Mary, Joseph's espoused wife, was found with child of the Holy Ghost, Joseph being a just man was minded to put her away privily. But when he thought on these things, "The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins." Now, this is a fact of which Joseph himself, and no other human being, was cognizant, and he alone could bear witness to its truth, so far as human testimony was concerned. Upon him it must have made an impression of that indelible kind, that not merely the fact of the dream or vision, but every word addressed to him by the angel, must have remained to the latest hour of his life imprinted upon his memory. He, therefore, was an unexceptionable witness to the fact, and from him it must have

been conveyed, either directly or otherwise, to St. Matthew.

Several other instances of the same kind occur in the second chapter. When the wise men of the East, after presenting their treasures, and paying their adorations to the infant Saviour, had departed into their own country, it is related,—that "the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word, for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him."*

Joseph having obeyed this command, we are told afterwards, that "when Herod was dead, behold an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Arise and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life."†

Again, it is said, that when he heard that Archelaus reigned in *Judea* he was afraid to go thither: "notwithstanding being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee, and came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth."‡ Now, here are four repeated instances of an angel appearing to Joseph in a dream,—facts to which he, and he alone could bear evidence, and, therefore, it could only be

* Matt. ii. 13. † Matt. ii. 20. ‡ Matt. ii. 22.

that St. Matthew obtained his information of them. The other matters stated in these two chapters,—the arrival of the wise men of the East in Jerusalem—their application to Herod—Herod's inquiry of the priests where the Saviour was to be born—their afterwards going to Bethlehem and presenting their gifts—the massacre of the innocents, and the death of Herod;—these were all facts open and notorious to the whole Jewish nation. It may be stated as an objection to the above supposition—of St. Matthew having obtained his information of these private facts from Joseph, that the latter appears to have died before the commencement of our Lord's ministry—at all events, that he was dead before its close—and, therefore, that St. Matthew could have derived none of his materials from him; but this objection disappears when we are informed, that St. Matthew was a native of the city of Nazareth, where Joseph and our Lord himself dwelt, and, therefore, had abundant opportunity of hearing the statement from Joseph's own lips before his death. Though we are not informed of the fact, it is extremely probable that St. Matthew, whose employment as a collector of the public revenue, proves him to have been a man of education, would be well known to the family of our Lord before he left Nazareth to settle in Capernaum; and this may account very naturally both for

the circumstances of his being afterwards called to become a disciple, and for his so readily obeying as it is recorded he did.

Again, on turning to St. Luke's Gospel, we find, in the two first chapters, various matters stated which are not contained in any of the other histories of our Lord,—and which most probably had been communicated to the evangelist by his blessed mother. Some of them could only be known to herself—others related to her cousin Elisabeth—a third class consist of incidents and sayings most likely to make an impression on the mind of a mother, and in which no other person could be expected to feel so warm an interest.

The genealogy introduced in the third chapter, is confessedly the genealogy of Mary herself;—which is an additional circumstance in favour of the supposition, that it was from her that St. Luke drew the materials for this portion of his work.

The facts which I have alluded to, as here related, are, first—the appearance of the angel to Zacharias in the Temple—his subsequent dumbness—the pregnancy of his wife Elisabeth—the birth of the Baptist—the restoration of speech to Zacharias, and the hymn of thanksgiving which he then uttered prophetic of the office which his son was to fill. All these great and miraculous events occurring in the family of a near relation, and intimately connected

as they were with events still greater and more astonishing, which more concerned herself, could not fail to be thoroughly known to Mary, and to have made upon her a deep impression. From the advanced age of the parents of John, it is probable that neither of them long survived his birth, and therefore it is not likely that St. Luke could have derived any information directly from them; but after their death, who could be so fit a depositary of these important facts of their history as Mary, their own relation and dear friend, and the mother of him to whom the son born under these miraculous circumstances was to be the forerunner, who was to go before his face and to prepare his way?

But the facts of which Mary, and Mary alone, could speak as a witness, are the astonishing event of the Annunciation, and the immaculate conception. It was most important that her evidence should be distinctly given respecting those circumstances of which no human being was cognizant but herself; and here that evidence is recorded in a manner so clear, so circumstantial, and at the same time so perfectly artless and natural, as to strike us at once, independently of all extraneous considerations, with a full conviction of its truth.

The circumstances attending Mary's visit to her cousin Elisabeth in the hill-country of Judea—the Salutation, and its effect upon Elisabeth—the beautiful

prophetic hymn then uttered by the virgin ;—all the circumstances attending the nativity—the facts of the Saviour being born in a stable and laid in a manger—the appearance of the angels to the shepherds —their coming to Bethlehem to see this "thing which the Lord had made known to them ;"—all these were matters, not so strictly private, but that they must have been known to many at the time ; but we may easily conceive that they were calculated to make a far deeper impression on Mary than on any casual observer or listener ; and accordingly we are told, that while in others they merely excited a transient emotion of " wonder,"—" Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart."

The other circumstances related are of a similar kind,—the circumcision on the eighth day—the presentation in the Temple—the song of Simeon—the thanksgiving of Anna—the bringing of Jesus to Jerusalem when he was twelve years old—his leaving his parents and being found disputing with the doctors—their rebuke and his answer on that occasion ;—all these are matters peculiarly likely to impress themselves on the memory of a mother, and which no one else could be so capable of relating correctly in all their particulars.

Some of the facts above referred to may have been, and undoubtedly were known, to various individuals ; but the blessed virgin was the only indivi-

dual to whom they were *all* known: and when we consider that the whole narrative as given by St. Luke bears the characteristic impression of one mind, I cannot entertain a doubt that the evangelist here drew his materials from a single source, and that that source was the mother of our Lord.

THE
SIMPLICITY OF THE GOSPEL NARRATIVE.
ST. MATTHEW.

The Gospel of St. Matthew consists of 28 chapters and 1071 verses. Of these, upwards of 600 verses, including several entire chapters, are taken up with the discourses, parables, and sayings of our Lord—of dialogues between him and his disciples —and of the answers given by him to his enemies, the Scribes and Pharisees—and this without reckoning various detached sayings, quotations from the Old Testament, etc., — so that the narrative does not amount to quite a third of the whole.

These discourses and sayings may be held to be given as nearly as possible in the very words used by our Lord himself. Of this we may be assured from the following considerations. St. Matthew was one of the first called of our Lord's immediate followers, and continued with him during the whole of his public ministry ; and therefore he had the best opportunities of hearing his discourses, and of

reporting them correctly. And having these opportunities for the due performance of this task, we may be sure he would entertain the most lively anxiety to observe the most scrupulous accuracy in this respect. His reverence for his Master, and his feeling of the unspeakable importance of what he had heard him utter, would naturally make him anxious that not one of his words should be allowed to fall to the ground. This, as far as natural feeling is concerned, would have a tendency to ensure the most perfect and literal accuracy; but in addition to this, we may be assured, that the influence of the Holy Spirit, which was poured out at Pentecost on all the Apostles, would be applied for the purpose of preserving the sacred penman from falling into error in a matter of so great moment.

The internal evidence of the discourses themselves, might alone be sufficient to satisfy us of their being entirely genuine. Take as an example the Sermon on the Mount. Its style and tenor are so infinitely superior to those of any human composition, as at once to mark it as coming from a Divine author. From beginning to end it is constructed according to the rules of the most perfect Hebrew poetry, and the matter is conceived in a strain of moral elevation as original as it is exalted. No wonder that the multitude who heard our Sa-

viour deliver this discourse, "were astonished at his doctrine."

The mingled simplicity and wisdom displayed in the parables need not to be pointed out, nor the many instances of kind and affectionate condescension contained in the discourses addressed to the disciples. But when we attend to the dignified reproofs—the unanswerable and crushing replies administered by our Lord, to his cunning and implacable enemies,—the bigotted and worldly Scribes, —the Sadducees enamoured of a vain philosophy— — and the self-righteous Pharisees, with hearts "crammed with arrogancy, spleen, and pride," we see that a greater than Moses—a greater than Solomon is here.

The narrative part of this Gospel, the only part which can be considered as the composition of the evangelist, is chiefly remarkable for its perfect simplicity and clearness. There is not in it the least attempt at a single ornament of style. The greatest events are told in the simplest possible manner; and yet the effect is frequently more striking and sublime, than could have been produced by any effort of human eloquence.

Take as an example the account of our Saviour's stilling the winds and the waves. In order to shew the entire beauty of this passage, we shall compare it with two parallel ones from profane authors.

Homer, in the Odyssey, thus describes Pallas allaying the storm raised by Neptune for the destruction of Ulysses—

> "Now, scarce withdrawn the fierce earth-shaking power,
> Jove's daughter, Pallas, watched the favouring hour.
> Back to their caves she bade the winds to fly,
> And hushed the blustering brethren of the sky.
> * * * *
> The third fair morn now blazed upon the main,
> Then glassy smooth lay all the liquid plain.
> The winds are hushed, the billows scarcely curled,
> And a dead silence stilled the watery world.

Horace, the most elegant of the Roman poets, thus describes a similar scene :—

> "Simul alba nautis
> Stella refulsit,
> Defluit saxis agitatus humor;
> Concidunt venti, fugiuntque nubes,
> Et minax (nam sic voluere) ponto
> Unda recumbit."

(Thus literally rendered :—)

> "Soon as the white star
> Shines on the mariner,
> Flows from the rocks, the agitated water,
> Down sink the winds, and the clouds disperse,
> And the threatening wave, (for so they* willed,)
> Rests on the ocean."

* The gods.

These descriptions are very beautiful, but not to be compared to the simple, yet expressive words—

> "And he arose, and rebuked the
> Winds and the sea,
> And there was a *great calm.*"

We feel that we have here the same Divine Being who said, "let there be light, and there was light."

Take as another example the account of that most wonderful transaction, the Transfiguration. If an uninspired writer of the greatest genius had attempted to describe such a scene, how would he have laboured to impress his readers with its unspeakable grandeur—brought together every circumstance his imagination could suggest, and accumulated epithet upon epithet to raise our ideas of the overwhelming magnificence of our Lord's appearing in his glory. But here we have nothing of the kind. All we are told is, "that he was transfigured before them; and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light."*

A little reflection will shew us, that any addition to these simple words, would weaken, instead of increasing their effect. The sun infinitely transcends in brightness every other object, insomuch that it cannot be steadily regarded by the human eye, but

* Matt. xvii. 2.

only glanced at for an instant. Having told us, that the face of the Saviour shone like that resplendent luminary, it is clearly impossible for words to go farther. Again, when it is said, that " his raiment was white as the light ;" this statement is equally incapable of addition. Whiteness is merely reflected light, and light is the pure essence of whiteness.

There is nothing in profane poetry with which this can be compared ; but we may compare it with another passage in St. Mathew's own writings,—where he describes the angel who appeared at the tomb of the Saviour, after his resurrection—" His countenance was *like lightning*, and his raiment white as snow."*

Though this description is wonderfully sublime, we cannot but admire the beautiful propriety with which it is *subordinated* in both its parts, to that of the Transfiguration. The face of the Saviour shone like *the sun*—that of the angel with the inferior brilliancy of *lightning*. The former possessed an intense and steady lustre, incapable of addition or change ; the latter only a transient and fitful splendour, flashing at intervals upon the spectator, and again leaving him in darkness. The one justly exemplifies the glory of the Lord ; the other, that of his messenger, or servant.

* Matt. xxviii. 3.

Again, the raiment of the angel is compared to snow; but that of the transfigured Saviour to light itself,—reminding us of the expression of the Psalmist, applied to Him who "clothes himself with light, as with a garment."

The same marked distinction appears in the effects produced by these two miraculous appearances. That of the angel produces only unmingled terror. We are told, that "for fear of him the keepers did shake and became as dead men." But far different was the feeling raised in the minds of the disciples by the glorious vision which met their eyes on the Mount of Transfiguration. They seem to have been transported with joy, and so ravished with tranquil delight, that they would have wished to remain there for ever:—"Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt let us make here three tabernacles: one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias."*

I shall just take one other example, where, in a few simple words, the evangelist describes a scene of unequalled sublimity.

"Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And behold, the vail of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks

* Matt. xvii. 4.

rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose," etc.*

Nothing can exceed the severe grandeur of this description; but it is evident that the grandeur belongs to the events described, and borrows nothing from the language in which the description is conveyed. It is equally evident, that any attempt to improve the passage, by adding new circumstances, or by swelling and lofty epithets, would altogether destroy its effect.

It is not my intention to write a Commentary on St. Matthew's Gospel, or to enter upon the theme so attractive, or apparently so endless, of pointing out the innumerable instances which it contains, of the greatness, the dignity, the condescension, the purity, the spotless perfection of the Saviour's character. All this has been fully shewn elsewhere, but what I here confine myself to, is the marvellous simplicity of style in which the evangelist relates the greatest, the most important, the most wonderful events that ever took place on earth—events to which no other history can afford a parallel.

The division of the Sacred Writings into chapters and verses is convenient, and indeed highly useful for the purpose of reference; but it is attended with one disadvantage, in leading us to regard these

* Matt. xxvii. 50, 51, 52.

writings more in the light of a series of texts than of a continued and connected composition: and the chapters affording easy resting places, we seldom read any considerable portion of them at once, and almost never think of reading an entire book *through*, as we do in the case of any interesting work of human genius. But let any one, already acquainted sufficiently with the details, make the experiment of reading this history of our Lord by St. Matthew, from beginning to end without stopping, and he will find, that as a mere story it far exceeds in interest and effect every other work that can be named, —inducing in the mind a feeling of calm satisfaction and unmingled delight, such as no other history in the world can afford even a glimpse of. It is true, this is mainly to be traced to the great and interesting events recorded, but much also is undoubtedly owing to the inimitable simplicity of its style.

METAPHORICAL IMPORT OF OUR LORD'S DISCOURSES.

Many of the discourses of our Lord recorded by St. John, are expressed in strong figures and metaphorical expressions, not understood by those to whom they were immediately addressed. These figures were generally suggested by the circumstances in which the conversations took place. For instance, in his conversation with the woman of Samaria at *Jacob's well*, we are told,—

"Jesus answered and said unto her, if thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, *give me to drink;* thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee *living water*." *

"Whosoever drinketh of *this* water shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that

* St. John, iv. 10.

I shall give him, shall be in him a *well* of *water* springing up into everlasting life." *

After the miracle of *feeding the five thousand* with *five barley loaves* and *two fishes*, when he said to them who sought him, "ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled:" he adds, "*Labour not for the meat which perisheth*, but for that meat which endureth unto *everlasting life*, which the Son of Man shall give unto you." †

They then ask a sign from him, as if the miracle they had lately witnessed had not been a sufficient sign, and referred to the manna which their fathers did eat in the wilderness, as if the giving of the manna had been a greater miracle than any which he had wrought. To this he replies, "Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but *my Father* giveth you the *true bread* from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.

"Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, *I am the bread of life:* he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."

"The Jews then murmured at him, because he

* St John, iv. 13, 14. † St. John, vi. 26, &c.

said, I am the bread which came down from heaven."

Following out the metaphor, he afterwards proceeds thus. "I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead."

So far from living longer than other men, they died in the wilderness, and did not see the promised land.

"This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

"The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, how can this man give us his flesh to eat."

He must have seen that they were offended with the bold language he had used, but nevertheless he proceeds in a strain still bolder and more startling.

"Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.

"Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed, (that is to say, it is meat and drink in such a sense, that no other meat or drink is worthy of being named in comparison with it).

"He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, *dwelleth in me, and I in him.*

"As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father; so he that *eateth me,* even he shall live by me.

"This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead; he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever."

It is obvious that the above discourse contained much to offend the Jews. Besides insisting on the necessity of "eating his flesh, and drinking his blood," he distinctly, and in so many words, claimed to be the Son of God, (verses 32, 37, 39,) and he claims to be himself God—or to be able to exercise the power of God, (verses 40 and 54).

"Many, therefore, of his disciples when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can bear it?"

Many of them were willing to receive him (like Nicodemus) as a "teacher sent from God"—but few were prepared to acknowledge him to be the Son of God—still less to be equal with God.

"When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you? What, and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where he was before?" intimating

that as he had come down from heaven, he would afterwards ascend again thither.

"It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing." (It is the spiritual meaning alone that profiteth—the words are not intended to be understood literally.) "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life. But there are some of you that believe not."

From that time we are told "many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." They first "murmured," and then they "strove," and then they left him altogether. But it is remarkable, that it was after this very discourse — upon this very occasion when his half disciples were offended at him and deserted him, that his true and sincere, but yet hardly enlightened disciple Peter, seems to have understood and acknowledged for the first time, the divinity of his Lord.

"Then said Jesus unto the twelve, will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. *And we believe, and are sure, that thou art that Christ,* (that anointed one,) *the Son of the living God.*"

I have delayed until now, attempting to explain the metaphorical language used in the preceding discourses, because I wished to follow them out in a connected view, in order to shew the manner in

which the figures are introduced, and the various lights in which they are presented.

The whole of these are made plain by referring to the passage in Deuteronomy, quoted by our Saviour in his reply to the tempter in the wilderness—"man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that cometh out of the mouth of God." *

What, then, is the meaning of "drinking the water that Christ shall give us,"—"eating the bread which came down from heaven,"—"eating his flesh and drinking his blood,"—"dwelling in Christ, and him dwelling in us?"

We may say as Joseph did to Pharoah regarding his dreams—the metaphors here used are one, the meaning of them is one, they all relate to the same thing.

What can this be, but reading and hearing the Word of the Lord; studying his history, his miracles, and his sayings; meditating on his sufferings and death; his resurrection and ascension into heaven; obeying his precepts; imbibing his spirit; becoming penetrated with love for his person, and admiration of his character; endeavouring to imitate his example and to have "the same mind in us that was also in him;" following him in this world's warfare as the Captain of our salvation; relying on his gra-

* Deut. viii. 3.

cious offers of assistance, and promises of eternal life; and feeling that though without him we can do nothing, by him strengthening us, we are able to do all things?

This alone is life. This it is "to live by faith in the Son of God"—to have "Christ in us, the hope of glory."

It is remarkable that this metaphor, so largely insisted on in the before-mentioned discourse, of eating the flesh of the Son of Man, and drinking his blood, is carried out and embodied in visible symbols in the institution of the Lord's Supper. In this way, the bread and wine there used, as representing the body and blood of Christ, shadow forth to us by lively images, the entire doctrine and substance of vital Christianity.

EMBLEMATICAL CHARACTER OF OUR LORD'S MIRACLES.

THE MIRACULOUS DRAUGHTS OF FISHES.

There is one quality in the miracles performed by our Saviour, during the period of his sojourning on earth, which distinguishes them from those which are recorded in the Old Testament, and it is this: that they are not only instances of supernatural power exerted in mercy to man in relieving him from physical evils; but they are emblematical, and may almost be considered prophetic, of a new æra in the history of the world, when the same power would be exerted for the removal of the far more deeply seated moral evils, which, since their first declension from innocence, have afflicted the human race. The miracles of healing the sick, cleansing the lepers, making the blind to see, the lame to walk, the

dumb to speak, and the like, are all emblematical of the Saviour's power to purge the soul from the evil and pollution of sin, and error, and all the weaknesses and frailties arising from those causes, and to restore to man that purity, wisdom, and moral greatness, which he lost at the fall.

The miracle of changing the water into wine at the marriage at Cana, has been supposed to be typical of the conversion or regeneration of the soul from the natural to the spiritual state, a work which all must admit, can only take place by means of divine influence.

The feeding of the four thousand and of the five thousand, at different times, by means of a few barley loaves and some small fishes, was emblematical of the boundless riches of divine grace, and the unlimited efficacy of that spiritual food which the Saviour is always ready to impart to those who are willing to receive it, and that without money and without price.

The raising of sundry individuals from the dead, is emblematical of the Saviour's power to revive those who are dead in trespasses and in sins, and to restore them to the enjoyment and the privileges of spiritual life.

There are two miracles very similar to each other, to which I, at present, wish to direct attention:—

namely, those where the disciples, on two different occasions, having cast their nets, agreeably to their Lord's directions, obtained each time a miraculous draught of fishes. Both of these were evidently emblematical of the conversion of multitudes to his doctrine; and, indeed, he himself, as we shall see, points to this application; but though thus far they are alike, they differ in other circumstances, which shew, I think, that they refer to different sets of events, and to different periods in which these were to be accomplished.

The first of the miracles took place at the very commencement of our Lord's public ministry; the other almost at the close of his appearance on earth, and after his resurrection from the dead. The first is related shortly in the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Mark; but the circumstances are more fully detailed by St. Luke, chap. v., verses 1–7. It is there mentioned, that as Jesus stood by the lake of Gennesaret, he saw two ships standing by the lake, but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. These fishermen having, as they afterwards informed him, toiled all night and caught nothing, and being tired, no doubt, of this unprofitable labour, had given up the task as hopeless, and had drawn up their ships to the beach. Having entered into one of the ships, which was

Simon's, he desired him to thrust out a little from the land, and he sat down and taught the people out of the ship.

When he had done speaking, he said to Simon, " Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught." Simon, dispirited by his want of success, the previous night, but re-assured by the calm and confident manner in which the command was given, let down the net accordingly ; and behold what happened. Observe every circumstance here related.

" And when they had this done, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes, *and their net brake.*

" And they beckoned unto their partners which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them ; and they came and filled both the ships, *so that they began to sink.*"

This unlooked-for success, so much beyond what could have occurred by natural means, filled the minds of these simple fishermen with terror. They were all astonished at the draught of fishes they had taken. Peter fell on his knees before Jesus, whom he clearly perceived to be a superior being, saying, " depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Jesus said unto Simon, " Fear not, from henceforth thou shalt catch men."

We shall now turn to the other instance referred to, which is related in the 21st chapter of the Gos-

pel of St. John, and is not mentioned by any of the other evangelists.

Our Lord was now risen after his crucifixion, and had, on two different occasions, appeared to his disciples, assembled at Jerusalem, when he had promised to go before them into Galilee, where they should see him again. Thither they accordingly went, and as they waited for his appearance, they resumed their old occupation of fishing in the Lake, or, as it is here called, (by the name given to it by the Gentiles,) the Sea of Tiberias. We are told they went forth, and entered into a ship; and that night, as on the former occasion, they caught nothing.

As the day began to dawn, a stranger appeared on the shore, near which their vessel was lying, and called to them, "Children, have ye any meat?" They answered him, "No." And he said unto them, "Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find." From this expression, it may be inferred, that they had hitherto their nets let down on the left side. The advice, or the command, therefore, was this,—You have caught nothing with your nets on that side of the ship: take them up, and throw them in on the *other side*, and I promise you success.

"They cast, therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes."

This immediately brought to their minds the former occasion when a similar miracle occurred. They now recognised the same divine power, who alone possessed the power to say, and it was done. "Therefore, that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord." They did not yet visibly recognize him at the distance where he stood, through the haze of the morning; but the internal evidence of the miracle, impressed on their minds a conviction that it was He, and no other.

Peter, on this, girt on his fisher's coat, and cast himself into the sea. The others followed him, dragging the net full of fishes. "Jesus said unto them, bring of the fish which ye have now caught. Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land, full of great fishes, an hundred, and fifty, and three ;" but this time their tackle held, for we are told that "for all there were so many, *yet was not the net broken*."

Now, in these differences, which we have noted, in contrasting the two cases, there must be *a meaning*, as there is in every word contained in the Sacred Book from which the narratives are taken. The following is offered as a probable explanation of what that meaning may be :—

The first miraculous draught refers to the conversion of the Jews. The *night*, during which nothing was caught, might prefigure the period that

was to elapse from the death of Christ—before the descent of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost; or it might refer to the whole period of our Lord's sojourn upon the earth, during which few or no converts were made to his doctrine; or it might refer to the whole previous history of the Jews, where we find throughout that all the wonderful instances of the goodness of Jehovah, and all the displays of his miraculous power had failed in softening the hardness of their hearts, or in turning them from darkness unto light.

No sooner however had the Holy Spirit descended as had been promised, and had filled the minds of the Apostles with knowledge of the truth and with boldness to declare it, than we are told, that by the preaching of Peter, and the testimony of himself and the other Apostles that Christ was risen from the dead, three thousand were in one day brought to acknowledge their belief, and were accordingly baptized. This was a promising commencement, and the Apostles probably expected that the work so auspicuously begun would proceed with encreased success. They had been told that they should catch men; and here, as in the first miraculous draught, there was indeed a wonderful present success. But the unfortunate omen of the "broken net," was too soon unhappily realized. The Sanhedrim, alarmed by the spread of the new doctrine, which they themselves did not believe, and which

they refused to examine—afraid that the Romans would lay hold of it as a pretext for taking away their place and nation, set on foot an active persecution against the Apostles. Some of them they scourged and imprisoned. One zealous convert was put to death. The Apostles were consequently obliged to conceal themselves, or to flee for safety. They would willingly have braved every danger, and in the cause of their divine Master have exposed themselves to stripes or to bonds. But the people, as well as their rulers, were generally against them. They felt that their lives, on which the sole hope of propagating their doctrines depended, were not safe. The omen of the *sinking ships*, seemed now about to be verified. They were at last obliged to yield to the storm; and as the Jews as a nation, seemed obstinately to persist in rejecting Christianity, they reluctantly and with heavy hearts—sorrowing for the unbelief of their brethren according to the flesh—turned to the Gentiles.

Let us now attend to the second miracle, which is related by St. John. Here again we have the night—the long, long night of Pagan darkness—which preceded the call of the Gentiles. To them, the Gentiles, this second draught may probably refer. Simon Peter and his companions had put down their nets without success on the left side of the ship. The persecutions raised by the Sanhe-

drim had taken effect. Men were terrified to adopt or even to listen to the new doctrine. The Apostles were calumniated, treated as criminals, and at last obliged to flee for their lives; and their exertions to gain converts in Jerusalem, or in Judea, seemed no longer to promise any success. They were then directed, or led by the Holy Spirit, to try a new field. They had been ordered to cast their nets on the other side of the ship, and they should find; but they still hesitated, until Peter, warned by a vision from heaven, felt at last that he had received a warrant for preaching to the Gentile nations.

The Apostles had indeed been commanded to go and teach all nations—and to preach the Gospel to every creature. But it is amazing how slow and reluctant they were to abandon their Jewish prejudices; and so long as their brethren of the house of Israel would listen to them, they probably would not have attempted what must have appeared to them so vast and perilous an undertaking. Situated as they were, however, this was now almost become a matter of necessity. They accordingly went into all the countries surrounding Judea, and spread themselves over Europe and Asia, and taught everywhere the people, preaching Jesus, and carrying everywhere the doctrine of the Cross.

Their success was now even greater than before. In all the countries wheresoever they went, they

found multitudes of converts. And this time also the omen held good. *The nets were not broken.* Though occasionally opposed, maltreated, and abused, they were wonderfully preserved, until their doctrine was disseminated throughout the bounds of the Roman Empire, (which then comprehended the whole civilized world,) and even numbered among its converts inmates of the Palace of the Cæsars.

I have omitted to mention one circumstance in which the cases differ, and which offers an additional ground for supposing that the above explanation is the true one. In the first miracle—that which we have considered as referring to the preaching of the Word to the Jews—Jesus was in the ship beside the disciples. He himself, attended by these disciples, publicly taught and exhorted the people, both in Judea and in Galilee, and continued his instructions during a period of three years, confirming his doctrine with many miracles; but yet he failed of convincing or converting that stiff-necked and rebellious nation, as did his Apostles after his death. *The net brake*, through the obstinacy and unbelief of the Jewish rulers, and their persecution of the Saviour during his life. *The net brake*, when He was at last betrayed into their hands, and put to a cruel and ignominious death. *The net brake*, when by their persecuting the Apostles, they compelled them to

flee from Jerusalem, and take refuge among the Gentiles.

The ship began to sink, even in our Lord's lifetime, when we are told he would walk no longer in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him. *The ship appeared to sink*, when at his crucifixion all the disciples forsook him and fled. Finally, the ship may be held as *having sunk*, at the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans.

But on the second occasion, our Lord was not in the ship. He stood on the shore. He was no longer exposed, as in the days of his humiliation, to the tempestuous sea of this world's troubles. His disciples were from henceforth to encounter these alone. In obedience to his command, they were to go forth to teach all nations. One purpose of the miracle undoubtedly was to prove to them, that though of themselves they could do nothing, yet while obeying his will, and through his strengthening them, they were able to accomplish all things. They were now to enter upon the work themselves—in a new field—one of peculiar interest and difficulty; and for the prosecution of this work they required some peculiar encouragement. Such encouragement was now given; for this time, *the net was not broken*, and the fishes enclosed by it, though so many, were all brought safely to the shore.

Let us consider the emblematical meaning of the two events once more. In the one case, the net being broken, it may reasonably be inferred, that it could not be used again. The attempt to convert the Jews as a nation having failed once, when tried under the most favourable circumstances,—by the Lord of glory in person, and afterwards by his immediate followers, and the eye-witnesses of his miracles and resurrection,—was not to be renewed again. Salvation having been offered to the Jews first, and having been obstinately rejected by them, they were from thenceforth to be left to their own devices, until the same salvation should be brought within the reach, not of a few only, but of all the Gentile nations under heaven. There are many prophecies to this effect scattered through different parts of Scripture, and with all these the emblem of the *broken net* perfectly accords.

If we are right in applying the emblem of the *unbroken* net to the case of the Gentiles, it must certainly be held as an encouragement to persevere in our endeavours for their conversion; for while the net remains whole, it is plain that it may be cast in again and again, until all the inhabitants of the earth shall be brought within the sound and the power of the Gospel.

The above does not seem to be a strained construction of these sacred emblems. Fact, reason,

and Scriptural analogy seem equally to point to the interpretation as probable, while it maintains a perfect consistency with the whole tenor of prophecy.

I shall just allude to one circumstance more, which may tend to give us a higher idea of the importance of these two miracles, and of the view now suggested* of their emblematical import, than the simplicity of the sacred narrative might at first sight lead us to entertain.

Our Lord, at his first appearance after his resurrection, sent word to his disciples, that he was *to go before them into Galilee*, and meet them there.

Why was he to meet them in Galilee? What was to be done there, that could not have been transacted equally well in Jerusalem? Why did our Lord impose upon the disciples the trouble of a journey into this distant region?

May not the reason have been this? He had first met them on the Sea of Tiberias, where he had performed the miracle of commanding *one* miraculous draught of fishes, the application and emblematical meaning of which he had himself pointed out, when he said that from thenceforth they should be fishers of men.

But this miracle was attended with the apparently adverse and unfortunate omens of the *broken net* and the *sinking ship*.

It was necessary for their encouragement, and

for the future instruction of his followers, that the miracle should be repeated, without these unhappy accompaniments.

But this could only be done upon the sea where the former miracle was performed; and that sea was in Galilee.

There is no other transaction recorded as having taken place in Galilee, in the intercourse between our Lord and his disciples after his resurrection, which might not equally well have been done anywhere else.

We may, therefore, perhaps, be entitled to conclude, that it was specially with a view to this, *his last miracle*, (and if our interpretation of it be correct, one of the most important, if not *the most important* he ever performed,) that our Lord, immediately after his rising from the dead, appointed his disciples to meet him in Galilee.

EMBLEMATICAL CHARACTER OF OUR LORD'S MIRACLES.

THE FEEDING OF THE 5000 AND OF THE 4000.

We have elsewhere mentioned, that the miracles of our Lord are parables exhibited in action, and are not only all fraught with general instruction, but that, in many cases, each circumstance is significant, and carries its own lesson of greater or less interest to the believer. Some, which have been intended to convey a truth of more than ordinary magnitude, are repeated; and at each repetition, some of the circumstances are varied, in a manner to which it is necessary to attend, if we would understand thoroughly the full design and object for which they have been recorded.

In another paper, we have endeavoured to illustrate one instance of an important miracle being

repeated with certain remarkable variations, and have stated what we conceive to have been the reason of the repetition, and the meaning conveyed by the change of circumstances. As a parallel instance to this we shall now mention another which was also performed twice; namely, that of feeding vast multitudes of people with a few small loaves and fishes—five thousand being fed at one time with five loaves and two fishes, and four thousand on another occasion with seven loaves and a few fishes.

If we consider these two miracles in their spiritual scope and meaning, we think they must have been intended to impress upon our minds a sense of the unbounded richness and preciousness of Gospel truth, and its unlimited power of supplying the wants and satisfying the desires of all who come within the range of its influence. This seems to be the general truth intended to be conveyed, and with this the particular circumstances recorded in both cases appear to us entirely to correspond.

The loaves made use of on both occasions were mere ordinary loaves, and the fishes mere ordinary fishes, no way differing from those which formed the common food of the people in the country where the transactions took place; but when our Saviour took them in his hands and blessed them, he communicated to them qualities and virtues which they did not previously possess. They acquired by this

blessing a nutritious richness, and a power of expansion which rendered them sufficient to meet the necessities of famishing multitudes. It consists entirely with the analogy of the spiritual interpretation of Scripture to hold this, as setting forth, in a lively manner, by sensible images, the nature and the efficacy of our Lord's method of teaching.

Take any instance that occurs either from the parables, or the discourses in which the Saviour has embodied his divine lessons,—nothing can be imagined more simple than the ground-work upon which they are raised, or more plain and familiar than the manner in which they are evolved and illustrated. The language made use of is the plainest human language—the images presented are the most common and obvious. Yet from these simple materials, our Lord, in a few words, and in the most natural and unforced way, deduces lessons of the most sublime and comprehensive import.

Take, for instance, the following examples from the sermon on the mount :—

"Ye are the light of the world." (He is speaking to those who were afterwards to become teachers of his doctrine.) "A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

"Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick ; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

"*Let your light so shine before men, that they may*

see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

"Ye shall know them by their fruits. *Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?*"

"What man is there *of you*, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?

"Or, if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?

"If ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven, give good things to them that ask him?"

Or take the parables in the thirteenth chapter of St. Matthew. How simple is the ground-work of all of them.

"A sower went forth to sow."

"The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field. But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares," &c.

"The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field," &c.

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal."

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field."

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant-man seeking goodly pearls."

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind."

The several simple objects here presented to us—the candle—the tree and its fruits—the father giving his son good gifts—the sower—the wheat and the tares—the grain of mustard-seed—the leaven—the treasure in the field—the goodly pearl—the draw net—appear at first sight to be matters wholly insignificant, and to contain nothing worthy of notice; but when considered more narrowly, as they are explained by our Lord, they come home to us fraught with the treasures of divine wisdom, and are found to comprehend what he himself declared to be, the "mysteries of the kingdom" of heaven. Without any laboured deduction, but just by a few impressive touches, he draws from them instruction fitted for every capacity. The most simple may find in them something they can understand; the most learned may discover by them truths of which they were previously ignorant. There is no limit to the numbers who may be refreshed by this spiritual food. One does not receive less, because thousands of others receive more.

Thus, in the miracle we were considering, the sensible objects exhibited—a few common loaves and fishes, which of themselves would not have afforded

nourishment to above three or four persons—receive from the touch of the Saviour a virtue and a power, which make them capable of filling and satisfying many thousands.

This miracle was performed twice. There must have been some reason for this repetition, for nothing connected with our Lord's ministry on earth is recorded without a reason. The following considerations are offered, as affording a probable clue to the mystery.

It appears, that up to the period when the miracle was performed for the first time, our Lord had confined his instructions to the Jewish nation. When he sent out his twelve Apostles to teach, he said to them, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."*

The same thing is repeated by him afterwards in regard to his own mission. "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel."†

On the occasion of the feeding of the five thousand, the multitudes were gathered from the neighbouring country of Galilee. The Galileans were considered a part of the Jewish nation; and though they were regarded with contempt by the haughty Scribes and Pharisees, they retained a knowledge, and in some degree, the worship of the true God;

* Matt. x. 5, 6. † Matt. xv. 24.

and were not looked upon, as the Samaritans were, as strangers and aliens. We are told that our Lord had been teaching the people and healing their sick, and as great multitudes followed him, he was desirous of retiring from them with his disciples for a time, in order that they might enjoy a little quiet, and that, therefore, they departed into a desert place by ship, privately. St. Luke informs us, that the place belonged to Bethsaida, a city which stood on the Lake of Tiberias.

When the people saw this, they followed him on foot by land, so that when he disembarked he was again surrounded by the multitude. When he saw them, we are told, he had compassion on them, "because they were as sheep not having a shepherd"—(the very expression formerly applied to the Jews as a nation,)—"and he began to teach them many things, and to heal their sick."

It was now *evening*. St. Luke says, that the "day began to wear away:"—St. Mark, that "the day was far spent." This affectingly corresponds with the state of the Jews. The morning and noontide of their existence as a nation were past; and the shades of evening were beginning to gather around them—the prelude of that long night of darkness and misfortune in which they were soon to be enveloped, and which has now continued for eighteen hundred years.

The disciples proposed that they should be sent away to get food; but Jesus said, "They need not depart. Give ye them to eat." The disciples could not understand how this could be done, having no supplies of food at hand sufficient for such a multitude. He saith to them, "How many loaves have ye? Go and see." And when they knew, they said, "five, and two small fishes." He said, "Bring them hither to me."

He then commanded them to sit down by companies on the grass. St. Luke says, his orders were, "make them sit down by fifties in a company." St. Mark says, that they sat down by hundreds and by fifties. It may be here noticed, that if the multitudes sat down by companies of fifty, one hundred of them would just amount to five thousand.

There is here inculcated a lesson of *order*, and we may conclude from it how necessary it is in every thing to observe a certain method and arrangement, when we see the Son of God himself prescribing it to the multitudes whom he was just about to feed by an exertion of miraculous power. How much more must this be necessary to be observed by our rulers and teachers, who possess none but natural means of providing either food or instruction to the people.

We are then told that "he took the five loaves and the two fishes; and looking up to heaven he

blessed, and brake the loaves and gave them to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. And the two fishes divided he among them. And they did all eat and were filled."

Such is the simple account of this great miracle. We are told that there were present five thousand men, besides women and children; and as we know that many women attended the discourses of our Lord, and witnessed his miracles, we may suppose that there were at least as many of these as of the men, in all ten thousand souls, who were fed on this occasion. All this immense multitude received, not a little merely to assuage the cravings of hunger, but enough to satisfy them to the full. "They all ate and were filled." But though this was, doubtless, a stupendous miracle, it was a small thing for the Son of God, to supply these multitudes with the bread and the meat that perisheth; it was only emblematical of his power and his willingness to provide for them all that bread which came down from heaven, of which if a man eat he shall live for ever.

We have already spoken of this, and need not enlarge further upon it here.

It was the custom among the Jews, as it is in most countries to this day, to put down at meals *more* than is absolutely necessary to satisfy appetite. This is done that all may not only have a sufficiency but a choice; and also that it may certainly appear,

that all have enough. Thus, when Ruth was entertained by the servants of Boaz, we are told that "she ate, and was sufficed, and left." This was the case with the multitudes here. After they had all eaten and were filled with food, something remained over. But the extraordinary circumstance is, that much more remained after the feast than the quantity provided at the first. And Jesus said to his disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost."

Two lessons are inculcated here: first, that we are not to abuse, waste, or neglect any of the blessings of Providence, and that this is a rule to be observed in small matters as well as in great. Nothing is given us to be wasted, and it is our bounden duty to take care that every mercy vouchsafed to us be duly improved, and every gift of God put to its proper use. But if this is our duty in regard to temporal mercies, how much more in regard to spiritual? If we are bound to be thus careful of the meat that perisheth, how much more of that which endureth to everlasting life?

If it is the duty of the master or mistress of a family to see that nothing be wasted or destroyed of the fragments left at meals, but that all that is left be reserved for future use; more especially does it become those who have the charge over the household

of faith, to take care that no particle of the instructions contained in the Scriptures of truth be allowed to go unimproved. There is not one of the words or actions of our Lord that is there recorded, but carries with it a lesson bearing upon some point of doctrine or of duty. It is therefore incumbent on us to gather up these, even to the minutest fragment, so as not to lose one jot or one tittle of that divine instruction which is fitted to make us wise unto salvation. The present is an humble attempt to gather a few crumbs from the feast, which this portion of sacred history sets before the faithful.

We are then told, that "they took up of the fragments *twelve* baskets full."

It has been suggested, with some appearance of reason, that as the Apostles had distributed the viands, so they also probably collected the fragments, and that the number of baskets mentioned would seem to indicate that each apostle filled his own. This may have been the case; but as it appears probable, from other circumstances, that this miracle of feeding the five thousand specially refers to the Jewish nation, it is not unreasonable farther to conclude, that the number of the baskets has reference to the twelve tribes, and sets forth typically that, after all the multitudes now present were satisfied, there remained over an abundant

supply of spiritual food that was sufficient for every one of the descendants of Jacob.

It may even be suggested, in reference to the present state of the House of Israel, that the circumstance may be meant to intimate, that the mercies in store for that people—the spiritual food laid up for their use—by which they are in time to be brought within the power of the Gospel,—are not to be exclusively confined to the people at present known among us as *Jews* (the descendants of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin), but that the other ten tribes, though now mixed and amalgamized with heathen nations, are at some future time to be distinguished, and are yet destined to receive and enjoy the benefits and the privileges of the new dispensation.

If we are right in these conjectures, and if the circumstances attending the miracle of feeding the five thousand point it out as referring solely to the Jewish people, it might, if it had stood alone, have led our Lord's followers into a grievous error. It might have led them to suppose that the Gospel was only intended for the Jews, and that the Gentiles were for ever to be excluded from its benefits. But as if on purpose to prevent any such erroneous conclusion, the miracle was repeated under circumstances which seem expressly contrived to include the Gentiles.

It is necessary that we attend to some occurrences which took place in the interval between these two occasions. Our Lord had, in the course of his public teaching, repeatedly come in contact with the Scribes and Pharisees, whose jealousy was excited against him on account of the crowds that followed him to hear his instructions and see his miracles. They regarded him as an impostor, and looked upon his pretensions as a messenger of heaven as amounting to blasphemy. They attributed his power of working miracles to magic, and accused him of various offences against the strict letter of the law, inconsistent, as they thought, with the character of a saint or a prophet. Instead of succumbing to their attacks, he on various occasions withstood them to the face, replying with unanswerable force to all their captious objections—sharply rebuking their own inconsistent conduct in making the law of none effect by their traditions—and plainly, before the whole people, calling them hypocrites, and blind leaders of the blind. This, of course, exasperated their enmity to the uttermost, so that they only waited for some plausible pretext to take away his life.

"After these things," we are informed by St. John, "Jesus walked in Galilee, for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him." *

* St. John, vii.

Whether it was to remove farther from danger, or for some other reason, we are told by St. Matthew and St. Mark, "that Jesus about this time went thence (from Galilee), and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon." *

Here we are informed, that a certain woman of Canaan—a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation—came and cried unto him, beseeching him to heal her daughter who was possessed with a devil. When his disciples said, "send her away for she crieth after us," he answered, "I am not sent, but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

It appears that he said this only to try the woman's faith, for we are told that when she earnestly besought him, he said to her, "Let the children first be fed: for it is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs." And she said, "true Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table."

Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto you even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour."

From this it appears, that what he had previously said of his not being sent but to the lost sheep of the House of Israel, was not a positive exclusion, but only a postponement of the calling of the Gen-

* St. Matt. xv. 21. St. Mark, vii. 24.

tiles. The words, "Let the children first be fed," afford a key to the whole. The Gospel was *first* to be offered to the Jews, and it was not till they had rejected it, that its blessings were generally extended to the Gentiles. We are then told, that again departing from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, he came nigh unto the Sea of Galilee; and multitudes having followed him and brought to him their lame, maimed, blind, dumb, and many others, and cast them at his feet, he healed them.

We are here informed that "the multitude *wondered*, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see; and they glorified *the God of Israel.*"

From all this it would appear probable, that the multitudes who now accompanied Jesus, were not inhabitants of Galilee, but strangers who had followed him from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. They had followed him for three days, which indicates that they had come from a distance. The fame of the miraculous cure of the Canaanite's daughter, had probably induced them to come after him, and bring him their lame, blind, and dumb to be healed. He had already gone through all the cities of Galilee, and healed all that were brought to him; but here was a new field opened for the display of his miraculous power. The natives of Galilee had witnessed many of his miracles, and

with them therefore they had ceased to be a novelty; but to these poor pagans, the exhibition of these astonishing works was entirely new, and therefore we are emphatically told, they *wondered*; and they glorified—not their own God, not the God of their fathers—but the God of Israel, the God of a nation alien to their own.

Jesus now called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat.

"If I send them away fasting to their own homes, they will faint by the way. For *divers of them came from afar.*"

Every circumstance here confirms the supposition that this multitude, or the greater part of them, were strangers to the country. It was not proposed, as in the former case, that they should "go into the towns and country round about, and lodge, and get victuals." If they had belonged to the country, this was certainly the most feasible resource; but if as we suppose they were strangers and pagans, such a mode of supplying their wants was out of the question. The Jews were at all times averse to intercourse with strangers, and if such a multitude of Gentile pilgrims had entered their villages in quest of food, it was not likely that they would meet with

a very cordial reception. This, accordingly, seems never to have been thought of; and as Jesus would not send them away fasting, seeing they were at a great distance from their homes, he resolved on supplying them by a second miraculous feast.

The account of the miracle itself is very nearly the same as in the former case; but still there are certain variations to which it is proper to attend.

"Jesus saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? and they said, Seven, and a few little fishes.

"And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground; and he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks and brake, and gave to his disciples, and his disciples to the multitude.

"And they did all eat, and were filled; and they took up of the broken meat that was left, seven baskets full.

"And they that did eat were four thousand men, beside women and children."

The circumstances here differ from those which occurred at feeding the five thousand in several particulars.

The first of these has reference to the quantity of the provisions supplied in either case, before the miraculous augmentation took place. On the first occasion, there were only *five* loaves and two fishes; on the second, there were *seven* loaves, the number

of fishes not being specified, as it is merely said there were a few little fishes.

The second point refers to the quantity of fragments left. In the first case, there were taken up of broken meat *twelve* baskets full; in the latter case, *seven* baskets.

It is perhaps not safe to speculate very minutely on numbers of this kind, or to conclude that there is a deep hidden meaning in every minute point of difference; at the same time, we cannot help remarking, that the numbers here mentioned do seem intended to bear a certain signification.

Throughout the whole of Scripture, a peculiar virtue and excellence seems to be attached to the number *seven*. Commentators are generally agreed, that this number indicates completeness and perfection, fulness and sufficiency.

If, then, we are correct in supposing, that the miracle of feeding the five thousand has reference to the Jews, and that of feeding the four thousand to the Gentiles—and that the miracle itself has reference to the supplies of Gospel instruction and divine grace—may it not be indicated here, that when the Gentiles were admitted to the privileges of the Gospel, the provision made for their instruction was, in some respects, more full, more perfect, more sufficient than that which had been vouchsafed to their elder brethren the Jews?

Certainly it must be admitted, that the means of grace and of spiritual instruction, now granted to Christians, are, in some respects, more ample than those which were, at any time, offered to the Jews, even in the most favoured periods of their history. The seven loaves may be typical of this fulness and completeness; while the number in the other case, being limited to five, may indicate that the amount of spiritual provision there fell somewhat short of that fulness.

Again, in regard to the fragments left, we have already observed, that the twelve baskets full taken up after the first miracle may have had reference to the twelve tribes. But the seven baskets of fragments taken up after the second miracle bear no relation to any thing concerning the Jews. We are told of this number seven, that it not only indicates fulness and perfection, but that it is often made to stand for any great indefinite number;* and it may therefore be considered as bearing reference to the Gentiles—comprehending a vast variety of separate nations and races of men—rather than to the Jews, who were distinguished from the first into the precise number of twelve tribes.

Some other circumstances remain to be noticed. We have observed that it is probable, that after the

* See Cruden's Concordance *v.* Seven.

miracle of feeding the five thousand, the fragments were collected by the twelve disciples, each of them filling his own basket: but on the other occasion it does not appear that the disciples took up the fragments, but rather that the people did so. We are told "they did all eat, and were filled, and *they* took up, &c." The same persons who ate, seem here to be those who gathered what was left. The number of baskets also does not correspond to the number of the disciples, any more than it does to the number of the tribes. They took up seven baskets full. May this not also have a typical reference? In both cases the Saviour delivered the food to the disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. Both in the case of the Jews and the Gentiles, the disciples, (afterwards called the Apostles,) were employed to publish the glad tidings of the Gospel to the people.

A certain number of the Jews were converted; but the great body of the nation rejected the Gospel. They did not "gather up the fragments that remained," after the spiritual feast. It was left to the Apostles to do so; and there is still, we confidently hope, reserved and laid up in safety ample supplies of heavenly food to bring in, in due time, the remnant of the house of Israel.

The Apostles also preached the Gospel to the Gentiles; and though they found among them also much infidelity and obstinacy, yet among them

there were always found some ready to receive, and willing to retain, the sublime and consoling doctrine of the Cross. After the ministry of the Apostles was finished, holy men arose in various countries, anxious to carry on the work, and to spread the knowledge of divine truth to every nation and every country under heaven. Among them (the Gentiles) God has at no period, even of the greatest moral darkness, left himself without a witness:—among them there have been at all times, some who were ready and willing "to gather up the fragments that remain," in order that not a particle of the spiritual food which Christ has left for the nourishment of his people, may ever be lost, but that all of it may ultimately be applied to the purpose for which it was given.

From all those indications, slight though some of them may be, we conceive that a considerable weight of evidence exists, in favour of the conclusion, that the miracle of feeding the five thousand refers to the case of the Jews—and that of feeding the four thousand to the Gentiles: and that it was the very intention and purpose of the second of these miracles, to shew that the Gentiles were not to be excluded from the privileges of the Gospel.

It affords an additional confirmation of these views in regard to the miracle now under consideration, that the very same meaning and intention ap-

pear to be indicated by the circumstances attending the two instances of the miraculous draught of fishes. The analogy between the two cases is perfect and complete. They each throw light upon and confirm the conclusion drawn from the circumstances of the other. The circumstances are too numerous and exact to have occurred by chance. We are therefore entitled to infer, that they have been arranged by design.

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

We are informed that if we pray to God for things agreeable to his will, he hears us. How are we to know what things are agreeable to the will of God? We answer that the short and comprehensive form of prayer which Christ taught his disciples, affords a clear and safe directory on this subject. We may be sure that the different petitions included in that prayer are all agreeable to the will of God.

In considering this prayer, our attention is first arrested by the opening words, "Our Father" &c.

This form is not intended solely for social or public worship, but rather for individual and secret prayer. That this is so, appears from the direction —"when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and having shut the door, pray to thy Father which is in secret," &c. This being a form therefore, for secret devotion, why does it commence with the

words, "*Our* Father?" when the prayer is put up in secret by one individual and solitary worshipper, ought not the words to be, "*My* Father?" We answer, No. We are not to pray for ourselves alone, but for all our brethren of mankind. Self is to be forgotten, except in so far as to remind us that we belong to the human family, the whole of which our prayers are to embrace. It is impossible to stop short of this. Shall we say, though we do not pray solely for ourselves, it is sufficient if we pray for our own family and friends? No. Our countrymen demand a share in our petitions. And shall we confine our petitions to these? No. All mankind are our brethren. Even the Jew was taught that the despised Samaritan was his "neighbour." Are we then allowed to exclude any? No. We are even commanded to pray for our enemies, much more for those who never knew, and never injured us.*

* Pope, in his Essay on Man, (though his principles are, in some respects, defective, in so far as he makes self-love the main-spring of human actions,) comes at last to the same conclusion. Thus—

> "Self-love, thus pushed to social, to divine
> Gives thee to make thy neighbour's blessing thine.
> Is this too little for thy boundless heart?
> Extend it; let thy enemies have part:
> Grasp the whole worlds of reason, life, and sense,
> In one close system of *benevolence*:

Perhaps we do not go too far in saying, that we are not warranted by this prayer to put up a single petition for ourselves, which we do not, *in the same breath*, put up for the whole human race.

The very first word therefore, of this most precious and instructive prayer, is fraught with a lesson of the highest value, and calls on us for an expression of that love of our neighbour, without a sincere feeling of which all profession of love to God must be mere pretence and mockery. "If we love not

> Happier as kinder, in whate'er degree,
> And height of bliss, but height of charity.
> God loves from whole to parts; but human soul
> Must rise from individual to the whole.
> Self-love but serves the virtuous soul to wake,
> As the small pebble stirs the peaceful lake.
> The centre moved, a circle straight succeeds,
> Another still, and still another spreads;
> *Friend, parent, neighbour, first it will embrace*
> *His country next, and next, all human race.*
> Wide and more wide, th' o'erflowings of the mind
> Take every creature in, of every kind:
> Earth smiles around, with boundless bounty blest,
> And heaven beholds its image in his breast."

The only defect in the above, is the error of deriving all this from *self-love;* whereas, in truth—friendship, love of offspring, and benevolence, are just as much original principles in the mind as the *love of self.* The true doctrine is not that these feelings are derived from self-love, but that they are in harmony with it.

our brother whom we have seen, how can we love God whom we have not seen ?"

The words, "Our Father which art in heaven," place God before us as the God and Father of the whole families of the earth. They place him before us as our Creator, Preserver, and constant and kind Benefactor, to whom we are indebted for all things, and on whose favour we depend every moment of our lives. Though he is "in Heaven," and though consequently we do not see him, we are every moment conscious of the benefits he is conferring upon us. Can we sincerely address him as "our Father," with all the love, reverence, gratitude, and confidence, which children bear towards an earthly parent? We cannot, without the aid of his Spirit. The idea of a perfectly holy, just, wise and omnipotent God, repels rather than attracts the natural mind. It excites an emotion of fear which is incompatible with confidence and filial love. All that we can conceive of his goodness, his kindness, his love for us, will not suffice to dispel this feeling unless we have received the "spirit of adoption," whereby we are enabled to say, "Abba, Father."*

* *Abba*, Father. The original text here, gives two words, one Hebrew, and the other Greek. The Greek word, "pater," signifies father, simply. The Hebrew word, "Abba," (very properly left untranslated,) means father, and something more. It is the highest and most respectful name addressed to the master of a family by

The first petition, "Hallowed be thy name"—implies a prayer that the worship of the true God may be extended over the whole world—and that "the earth may be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea:" the second petition, "Thy kingdom come"—that all "the kingdoms of this world may become the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ:" and the third, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"—looks forward to the time figuratively predicted by Isaiah, when "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid," and when there shall be "nothing to hurt nor to

his emancipated slave, to whom he has given freedom, and whom he has adopted as his son. We are told, that among the Jews, the common domestic servants or slaves were not permitted to address their master in this style. It was only after being adopted as a son, and raised to the condition of a member of the family, that they were allowed to use this endearing and affectionate, but still highly respectful term. This will enable us to see the beauty and propriety of that allusion of St. Paul, (Rom. viii. 15,) "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry *Abba, Father.*"

Our addresses to God, therefore, are not to be as those of a slave to his master, but as those of children to a parent.

That it is by the aid of the "Spirit" alone, we are enabled so to address him, is plain from what St. Paul says, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God. And if children, then heirs," &c.

This thought is fraught with the greatest encouragement to all true believers.

destroy in all the holy mountain of the Lord." All these things we know to be "agreeable to the will of God;" they are the express subjects of numerous prophecies, and he has declared he will bring them to pass in his own good time.

A strong instance of verbal propriety occurs in the fourth petition—"Give us *this* day our daily bread." Why is the petition limited to "this day?" Should it not run thus—"Give us *each* day our daily bread?" We answer, No. The expression "this day" is most significant. The prayer is to be renewed daily, and therefore the petition is not extended, and does not require extension, beyond the passing day. We are told elsewhere to take no thought for to-morrow, and to let the morrow take thought for the things of itself; in other words, to leave the care of the future to Providence. If each day, as we put up our petitions to him who "feedeth the ravens," we find that we are provided with needful subsistence, it is all we require, and all we are warranted to ask.

But this petition does not refer solely to the food which sustains the body; it includes a request for all things pertaining to life and godliness. We are told to "labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that which endureth to everlasting life." It is written that "man shall not live by bread alone,

but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." These are what we are chiefly to ask; not the mere food of the body, but that heavenly bread which nourisheth the soul.

And the petition is not for ourselves alone, or even for our friends, our neighbours, our kindred and countrymen, but for our whole brethren of mankind. It is not "Give me;" it is "Give us."

The same remark applies to the fifth petition, "forgive us our debts." Every man wishes no doubt, that his own sins may be forgiven; but this is a petition for forgiveness of the sins of the whole world—for pardon to the whole fallen and sinful race of Adam; nor can it be acceptably preferred to the throne of grace, except in this truly Catholic spirit.

This becomes more obvious when we consider the condition annexed. We ask for ourselves and our brethren, forgiveness of our debts, "as we forgive our debtors." As our whole race lies under the condemnation that is due to sin, those can only expect pardon who are willing freely to pardon others. This is required of us, as an evidence of that love which we are all commanded to bear one to another. If, while we utter the words of this prayer, we are conscious that we retain in our heart any feeling of bitterness against "our neighbour," we are mocking the Most High, in asking his for-

giveness; and until we can pray in a different spirit, we cannot expect a favourable hearing.

The sixth petition—" Lead us not into temptation," impressively teaches us, while we pronounce the words, to avoid all occasions of temptation. We cannot consistently or sincerely ask not to be led into temptation, into which we are every day ready to walk with our eyes open.

The seventh and last petition,—" Deliver us from evil," is, perhaps, the most comprehensive of all. It is that, of all others, that we are most apt to prefer exclusively for ourselves. Let us beware of this error, and pray not only that evil be averted from ourselves, but that all the evil that is in the world may be finally taken away.

If we were asked, what are the evils from which we desired to be delivered? most of us would be ready to answer—" Pain, poverty, disgrace, loss of friends, ruin of worldly prospects, disease, and death."* But we forget that there is a greater evil than all these, in comparison with which they are hardly to be considered as evils. This is the evil

* " Man's feeble race, what ills await!
Labour and Penury, the racks of Pain,
Disease, and Sorrow's weeping train,
And Death, sad refuge from the storms of fate!"

The beautiful lines which follow would be more true, if they were transferred from the contemplation of the " Progress of Poesy" to

of *sin*, and its consequences—the wrath of God, and exclusion from his presence for ever. It is from these last and greatest of evils that we are chiefly to pray to be delivered.

This sublime prayer concludes with a doxology—"*For* thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen." Every word here is significant. We do not merely say—"Thine is the kingdom," etc.—which is a fact; but we state this fact as *the reason* why we address to God all the foregoing petitions. His greatness, his power, and his glory, instead of deterring us, and driving us from his presence, are the very reasons assigned why we are to draw near to him in prayer. It is, *because* he is mighty, that we are encouraged to rely upon him, as our helper—"our rock and our defence, our confidence and our hope, and the horn of our salvation, and our high tower."

We do not merely say—"For thine is kingdom, power, and glory;" but, "thine is *the* kingdom,

that of the progress of the Gospel. Taken in this view the imagery of the following lines would leave nothing to be desired.

> "Night and all her sickly dews—
> Her spectres wan, and birds of boding cry,
> He gives to range the dreary sky;
> Till down the eastern cliffs afar,
> Hyperion's march they spy—and glittering shafts of war."
>
> GRAY.

the power, and *the* glory,"—the only kingdom, the only power, the only glory, that is deserving of the name. All worldly power and glory shall fade, and worldly kingdoms shall come to an end; but of his glory there shall be no end, and his kingdom shall endure for ever and ever.

I cannot refrain from noticing, once more, the wonderful comprehensiveness of the words of this prayer, which not only contains a complete classification of all the legitimate objects of our requests to God, but suggests, at the same time, motives to every human duty, or, at least, the spirit and sentiment that leads to the performance of every duty. The dispositions here suggested are:—

PETITIONS.—1, 2, 3.—Love to God, and zeal for his glory.
4.—Love to man, and zeal for his welfare.
Trust in Providence.
5.—Forgiveness of injuries.
6.—Avoidance of temptations, and,
7.—Fear of incurring the Divine displeasure.

These are the general heads of this prayer, and short and few as they are, if we consider them attentively, I believe we shall find that they include all that the Christian requires or is warranted to pray for. It does not follow that we are always to employ the same words, or that we are never to use any other form in our addresses to our Creator.

On the contrary, we are encouraged, nay commanded to pour out to him the desires of our hearts, to commune with him in the retirement of our closets, and to put up our petitions in the bosom of our families, and in the midst of the congregation. It is not the words of this prayer that we are so rigidly to adhere to, but its spirit and substance.

If we attend to the nature of the several petitions, we cannot err much as to the subject of our prayers; but that which we are especially to observe is, that we put up our petitions in that spirit which alone can render them acceptable.

Let us beware that we do not pray, or attempt to pray, in a spirit of *selfishness*. The whole scope and tenor of the prayer we have been considering, is diametrically opposite to such a spirit.

Let us beware that we do not pray in a spirit of *presumption*, as relying on ourselves and our own righteousness. We all need to be reminded that our prayers can only be accepted for the sake, and through the intercession of the Redeemer; and that the prayer of the lowest heart-broken sinner, if put up with faith, and in a sincere reliance on him, may be accepted; while that of the spiritually proud, who thank God, "they are not as other men are," will be scattered to the winds.

Let us beware that we pray not in a spirit of *formality*, as a stated ceremony fit to be observed, or,

as having any merit in itself, without a correspondent feeling of the heart.

Let us beware that we do not pray in a spirit of *wilfulness*, as dictating to God what he should do, what blessing he should grant, or from what evils he should deliver us, and as expecting that his will is to bend to a compliance with our's.

Let us, on the contrary, pray in a spirit of *humility*—not the mock humility which is akin to pride—not the abject humility, which is akin to meanness—but an unfeigned and heartfelt sense of our low and lost estate, as sinners, and relying solely for acceptance on the merits of our all-sufficient Mediator.

Let us pray in the spirit of *love*—love to God, and reverence for him as our Father; and love to men as our brethren.

Let us pray in a spirit of *submission*—in all things submitting our will to that of our heavenly Father. In asking any particular blessing, or deliverance from any particular evil, let it always be with this reservation, (in which we follow the highest example,) "nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done."

Lastly, Let us pray with a due reliance on the Spirit of all grace, knowing that though of ourselves we know not what to pray for as we ought—"the Spirit itself helpeth our infirmities, making intercession for us, with groanings that cannot be uttered."

THE CHRISTIAN SABBATH.

The Sabbath was made for man. It is an institution accommodated in mercy to his nature and his wants. Its observance is no doubt sanctioned by a divine command, but the command is not an arbitrary one; it is founded on the most substantial and salutary reasons, and is conducive in the highest degree to the welfare and happiness of our species.

Man was not made for a life of indolence, but for one of active employment. This was the case in Paradise itself; as we are told that immediately on his creation, "the Lord God took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it." This was a delightful task certainly, but still it was a task. It was a work that was given him to do, and in performing it he could not fail to reap a constant succession of varied enjoyments. Indeed so fascinating might we suppose the delights of a labour so gentle and so attractive, that he might

have been in danger of pursuing it too far, so as to exhaust and debilitate his powers, and lead him to forget the source from which he derived all his blessings, had not God interposed the Sabbath, as a salutary check to over exertion in employments even the most innocent—a periodical season of rest, a time for reflection, for contemplation, and religious exercise.

In speaking of the Sabbath, it is a common error to trace its origin no higher than the commandment delivered to the Jews by Moses, which might lead us to consider it as an institution peculiar to that people, and to suppose that like the ceremonial law, it was not intended to be binding on mankind generally. But it is necessary to observe, that the institution goes much higher than this, and that in fact it took place immediately after the creation. We are told in Genesis, chap. ii. v. 2, that "on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made: and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because that in it he had rested from all his work which God had created and made."

We see therefore that this was no new command first delivered on Sinai, but that it was an institution coeval with the creation of man; that it was not intended to be confined to a single people, but

was to be binding on the whole human race in all periods of time and under all circumstances; that it was an institution in Paradise itself; that it has continued equally obligatory since the fall, and that it must continue so as long as there shall be human beings existing in the world.

It is proper to observe the very peculiar terms in which this commandment is introduced in the law which was delivered to Moses. Most of the other commandments are expressed by negatives. "Thou shalt have *no* other Gods before me." "Thou shalt *not* kill." "Thou shalt *not* steal." "Thou shalt *not* commit adultery." "Thou shalt *not* covet." The fifth commandment is a positive injunction. "Honour thy father and thy mother." But this which we are considering is expressed both in the positive and negative form, and is the only one of the commandments that is so expressed.

The subject is opened by the solemn *positive* command—"Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy."

Two remarks occur upon this. First, it is evident from the use of the words, "*Remember* the Sabbath day"—that this could be no new institution now made known to the Jews for the first time. The Sabbath day is not announced as something new; it is referred to as something already known, and which they are now commanded to "remember."

We may readily suppose, that though it was known to the Israelites by tradition, that God had at the creation sanctified the seventh day, and made it a Sabbath of rest, they were apt to forget this; and during their long and weary servitude in Egypt, they may have been compelled by their hard task-masters to labour on that day, as on others, without any period of rest or relaxation. For this reason it may have been peculiarly necessary now to renew the command—to remind them of the merciful institution of a day of rest—and to enjoin them in the most solemn manner to "remember to keep it holy."

But the commandment contains more than this. It applies not to one day only, but to all the days of the week. It is not limited to an injunction to keep holy the seventh day; but there is an express and positive command applicable to the other days. "Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work." This is just as much a commanded duty as to rest on the seventh day.

All men have duties to perform of one kind or another. There are some so liberally supplied with worldly wealth, as to be under no actual necessity of submitting to bodily labour for the purpose of procuring the necessaries of life. But these have duties imposed upon them of a different kind, duties not the less onerous, and implying labours not the less

arduous, that they are not labours of the hands. Wealth itself is a trust committed to those who are endowed with it, not for their own gratification merely, but to be employed as far as possible for the general benefit of all with whom they are connected. The greater the possessions and the riches of any individual may be, the greater is the trust, the weightier the responsibility. Large possessions impose only the heavier duties, and the due administration of them is a task of no light magnitude. None, therefore, and the greatest and the wealthiest least of all, are exempted from the universal obligation imposed on the whole race of man to labour. All have a work of some kind to perform, and this commandment expressly enjoins us to perform it, and points out the time within which it ought to be performed. In one sense, therefore, it is not merely limited to the duty of observing the Sabbath, but extends to the whole range of human duty—to every act, to every employment in which we can be usefully engaged.

It is a commandment against idleness and sloth. "Six days shalt thou labour." This is addressed to all—to the lord of millions, as well as to the servant who grinds at the mill. It is a commandment against procrastination. "Six days shalt thou labour and do *all* thy work." We are not merely to work, but to work diligently; not merely to do a

certain part, but the whole of our work; we are to do all that is incumbent upon us in six days, in order that we may rest on the seventh.

It is also proper to observe the terms in which the rest of the seventh day is commanded. This part of the commandment is in the negative form, and is expressed in the strongest and the most anxious terms which it is possible to conceive: "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work,—thou, nor thy son,,nor thy daughter, nor thy man-slave, nor thy woman-slave, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates."

It may be asked, for what purpose is this anxious iteration and enumeration of persons? Might it not have been held sufficient to say, "in it, the seventh day, thou shalt not do any work;" and that this would apply to all? To this it may be sufficient to answer, that it is calculated to shew the greater anxiety to impress upon those, to whom the command was delivered, the great importance and universal application of this law; and that this was more especially necessary here, because the importance of the law, its immense utility, and its tendency to promote the advantage of our race, is not so perfectly evident, as is the case with some of the other commandments, and, hence, that it is more apt to be neglected and forgotten. Or it may have been,

because the Israelites were, and their descendants are to this day, so literal in their interpretation of Scripture, that the master of a family might have thought he obeyed the commandment, by refraining from labour himself on the Sabbath; but that he might lawfully oblige, or suffer his children and servants, his cattle, or strangers in his house, to perform their usual labours on that day. From the manner in which the commandment is expressed, however, it is impossible to fall into this mistake. Not only is it made evident that the commandment applies to all—master and servant, bond and free; but the master of the house is made responsible for his household—the father for his children—the entertainer for his guest. The commandment applies to all; but, on the head of his family, is imposed the additional duty to see that all obey it.

One beautiful provision, and not a solitary one in the Mosaic law, is that which extends the benefit of the rest of the Sabbath, even to the inferior creation. On this day, the plough lies idle in the furrow. The steer wanders through the pastures, ungalled by the yoke. The generous steed, freed from his usual trappings, bounds careless over the plain. Even the inhabitants of the desert, the wild denizens of the forest, feel on this day relieved from the attacks of their deadliest foes, for man, on this day, suspends the toils and labours of the chase.

All animated nature enjoys the refreshment of rest and sends up as from one great altar, a mute but heartfelt tribute of thanks to the bountiful Giver of all.

The commandment concludes with an express reference to the original institution of the Sabbath day at the creation.—"For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day; wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it." It is evident there is nothing new here. It is a simple repetition, almost in the same words of what is contained in the three first verses of the second chapter of Genesis.

We have now given a history of this institution from its first origin in Paradise, and stated the terms of the republication of the law, when the commandments were delivered to the Israelites in the wilderness of Sinai. It is now proper to mention a change that has taken place, not in the institution itself, but in the time and in some respects in the mode of its observance—in the events of which it is now to be considered as commemorative, and in the feelings and reflections which these are fitted to inspire.

The Jewish Sabbath, or more properly speaking, the Sabbath of the ancient world, was held, as has been mentioned, on the seventh day of the week:

the Sabbath, or weekly festival of the Christian world, is held universally on the first. It may be asked, where is the authority for this change, and what were the reasons for making it? In regard to the authority, the unanimous practice of the first Christians, including the Apostles, the universal consent of all the Churches of Christendom, and the unbroken usage of all Christian nations from the first establishment of Christianity to the present time, may perhaps be reckoned sufficient. But if we inquire into the *reasons* for the change, many will appear, the solidity of which cannot be disputed.

The chief of these reasons—indeed that which may be said to include all the rest, is that upon this day the Saviour completed the great work of our redemption by his rising from the dead. It was fitting that his followers, who believed on him as the promised Messiah—who loved him while alive, and who mourned for him when he was laid in the tomb—it was fitting that they should rejoice and be glad, when after having conquered the powers of hell, he rose from the grave, death being swallowed up in victory. It did not require an express command to induce them to hallow, and to sanctify a day distinguished by an event so glorious and so vitally interesting to all true believers. Their feelings as contemplating the great work of their sal-

vation which was this day completed, must have been such as to *constrain* them to observe it universally as a day of joy and rejoicing—a day sacred to devout contemplation—a day not to be profaned by the petty cares and insignificant labours of ordinary life: and if these were the feelings of the immediate followers of our Lord after his resurrection, what possible reason can be assigned why the same feelings should not still continue to animate us, and induce us to commemorate that day by a similar observance even to the end of the world? The Gospel is not less glad tidings to us than it was to them; the death and resurrection of the Saviour are events the memory of which will never grow faint; they are as fresh, as interesting, as wonderful now, and as fitted to excite our loftiest contemplations and our warmest raptures, as they were at the very time when they occurred.

But the reason of the change of the sacred day from the seventh to the first day of the week, will appear doubly cogent, when we consider that during the whole of the seventh day the body of the Messiah lay in the tomb. On this day—the day immediately following the crucifixion—to his disciples a day of doubt, anxiety, and terror, almost of despair,—they could not rejoice, they could hardly presume to hope. How could they rejoice on the weekly

return of that day, which could bring to them recollections of nothing but shame and overwhelming sorrow? He whom they had regarded as their master, their father and friend, who they trusted was to have redeemed Israel—having been betrayed into the hands of his enemies—buffeted, scourged, condemned to a cruel death, executed as a common malefactor—had perished on a gibbet, and was dead. This was not a day to be consecrated, or to be commemorated with joyful thanksgiving. The reason—the propriety of the thing—must at once have made it obvious, that these rejoicings and thanksgivings would be more appropriately reserved for the return of that hallowed morn, when after the dark night of trouble and despair, the Sun of righteousness arose upon them with healing under his wings.

When we go back to the commencement of time, there appears another circumstance connected with the first day of the week, which renders it peculiarly appropriate as a day to be kept in joyful remembrance. If, in the ancient Sabbath, the seventh day, the work of creation was *finished*, and God rested from all the work that he had made; it will be remembered, that on the first day the work of creation was *begun*. And it will farther be remembered, what was created on that day. The

work of that day is thus related in the sublime words of inspiration :—

"And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

"And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

"And God saw the light that it was good : and God divided the light from the darkness.

"And God called the light, day; and the darkness he called night : and the evening and the morning were the first day."

On this day, therefore, in the natural world, God commenced the great work of creation, by causing light to appear at his word; and in the moral and Christian world, he finished the great work of redemption, by causing to arise from the tomb Him who was sent to enlighten the nations.

Lastly, it was on the first day of the week, that after our Lord's ascension to heaven, the last striking evidence was afforded of the divinity of his mission, by the descent of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost;* when the Apostles were endowed with those mighty gifts and miraculous powers which enabled them effectually to obey his command, to go and teach all nations.

This day is therefore trebly hallowed and conse-

* Now called Whitsunday.

crated to God, in his threefold character of Creator, Redeemer, and Comforter; and its return is fitted to bring to our recollection the three greatest manifestations of his favour, his mercy, and his love, as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.

It follows from this change of the day on which the Sabbath is held, and the new and additional considerations on account of which it is to be hallowed and sanctified, that it ought to be observed among Christians in a somewhat different way from that in which it was kept by the Jews. Whether it was so intended from the first may reasonably be doubted, but it seems certain that latterly at least the chief, if not the sole purpose of the Sabbath has been considered among that people as merely a *rest* from labour No doubt it was the custom among some of them on that day, to assemble together in their synagogues, but that does not seem to have been considered imperative. Rest, absolute rest—the mere negation of labour—seems to have been all that they understood to be required in the commandment to keep holy the Sabbath; and this they took in so literal a sense, as to make no exception whatever. Our Savour laboured to convince them of their error in adopting this sort of interpretation, adhering rigidly to the letter of the commandment and neglecting its spirit; and he shewed them by

his own example, his opinion of the lawfulness of performing on that day works of charity and mercy, by exerting his miraculous powers in healing diseases, and relieving many of divers infirmities. His endeavours to this purpose were however without effect; and so far were they from being convinced by his arguments, even though enforced by the most splendid miracles, that they accused him on this very account of being a Sabbath breaker and a sinner, and for this reason, among others, sought to put him to death. So far did they carry this absurd and limited view respecting the Sabbath and its observance, that they even refused on this day to defend their city on the occasion of its last memorable siege by the Romans; and the consequence was, that the besiegers, taking advantage of this piece of incredible folly, and finding that the walls of the city were not defended on this particular day, chose this occasion for making a general assault; and provoked by the obstinacy of their previous resistance, razed it to the ground, destroyed their magnificent temple, and by the general massacre of the inhabitants almost exterminated the whole nation.

It is evident from this memorable catastrophe—from the precepts, and above all, from the example of our Saviour, that this is not the way in which his followers are called upon to sanctify their Sabbath. We may apply to this, what he said of their obser-

vance of the Moral Law in general, that unless our righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, we shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven. The Scribes and Pharisees, following the strict letter of the commandment, thought that they obeyed it by abstaining from labour on the Sabbath, and by strictly refraining from doing upon that day any work whatever, good or bad. Our Saviour sufficiently exposed this error, when he told them, that the "Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath:"—when he asked them the question, to which they could return no answer, "is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath day, or to do evil, to save life, or to destroy it?"—when he shewed by his own example, the true mode of hallowing the Sabbath—by works of charity and mercy,—when he on that day cured those afflicted with divers diseases, for instance, when he cured the sick of the palsy—when he restored the withered hand—when he, on this day, gave sight to the blind, and cured the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda. Is not all this a sufficient warrant to us, of the lawfulness and propriety, not only of curing diseases on this day, but of performing every work by which human life can be preserved, or human suffering relieved?

Notwithstanding this lesson, and others which will be afterwards noticed, there are still among us many

excellent persons who seem more inclined than is reasonable, to the narrow, rigid, literal, and, as it may be called, Judaical observance of the Sabbath, which was followed by the Scribes and Pharisees of old. They generally admit as allowable exceptions, acts of necessity and mercy; but there are acts which do not fall strictly within either of these categories, which we have the authority and example of the Saviour himself for declaring to be perfectly lawful and innocent, and no infringement of the rest of the Sabbath. There are some so strict as to object to the smallest recreation on that day, particularly to that so conducive to health, of enjoying fresh air, and exercise in the fields. We may say as to this, that every thing depends upon the spirit in which this recreation is indulged in. No one will dispute that to be engaged in idly strolling about the fields, and indulging in foolish and unprofitable discourse, is a profanation of the Lord's day, and ought by all means to be discouraged and repressed;—but on the other hand, there can, it is conceived, be no harm, but the contrary, after the duties of public and private devotion have been properly and carefully attended to—in going forth in a calm and cheerful frame of mind, to enjoy the beauties of nature, and to inhale the fresh breezes of heaven. I can conceive nothing more innocent, or indeed praiseworthy, than a family in this frame of mind, ac-

companying their parents in a Sunday evening walk, the latter pointing out to them, from time to time, some natural phenomenon not previously observed, explaining its causes or its effects, and leading them from thence to admire the wisdom, the power, and the beneficence, of the Great Author of all.

In addition to the above, it may be mentioned that, to many in the labouring and middle classes of society, particularly those "in populous cities pent," this is the only day on which they have any opportunity of relaxation; that, on the other days of the week their time is entirely occupied, and their strength wasted by severe toil, or close unremitting confinement, many of them in ill-aired and unwholesome apartments; and that, but for the interval of the Sabbath, many would have no means or opportunity of ever seeing or enjoying the green verdure of the fields, or the blessed light of Heaven. Would we have the cruelty to deprive them of this? to confine them all the Sabbath to their narrow lanes, and low-roofed, dark, and stifling houses? Surely this cannot be the will of the Almighty in ordaining the Sabbath. The Sabbath was intended to promote the ease, the comfort, and the happiness of man. It was intended to be, and it ought to be, a delight—and not a punishment.

If these arguments are not considered sufficient—may it not be allowed to adduce the example of our

Lord and his disciples, who, we are told, "walked through the fields of corn on the Sabbath day." No reason is assigned for their being so employed; nor is there any ever supposed to be necessary. It is mentioned simply, as indeed it was, as a perfectly lawful and innocent act, on the Sabbath no less than as on any other day of the week, and what was done by them, may surely now be done, without offence, by their followers.

It is with no desire whatever of justifying idleness and folly, that I am led to make these remarks; but to point out what I conceive to be the error of some most excellent and worthy persons, who not only themselves practice, but also wish to impose upon the community, an over rigid and Judaical observance of the Lord's day. The outward act signifies nothing; everything depends upon the disposition of the mind. One may spend the day entirely at home, and indulge in the grossest vice, or in the most unhallowed imaginations. Another may walk out into the fields, and store his mind with the most beautiful images of nature, or raise his thoughts to Heaven in the most sublime contemplations. It is evident, from many parts of his history, that much of our Saviour's time was passed with his disciples in the open fields; and it may be mentioned, for the benefit of those who are fond of out-door exercise, how he improved such opportunities of social converse, and drew

moral reflections from every object that met his view. Pointing at the flowers with which the earth is covered in spring, he told his followers to "Behold the lilies of the field," and added, "Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." He pointed to the birds of the air and said, "Consider the ravens—they neither sow nor reap, but your Heavenly Father feedeth them." And on the evening of that day when he had eaten his last repast with his disciples, as passing through the vineyards that surrounded Jerusalem, he began that beautiful discourse, "I am the true vine." He who like Him, is prepared to turn every thing to profit, —to draw a useful lesson from every object, and, whatever he does to do all to the glory of God, will find—

> "Tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
> Sermons in stones, and good in every thing."

Another purpose to which, among the labouring classes, the Sabbath is often made subservient to enjoyment, is its enabling them to meet with their friends, and to be happy for a short time in the society of those from whom they are separated during the week. Those who would debar them from this gratification, have not sufficiently considered, or at any rate do not fully understand, what is meant by the saying—"I will have mercy and not sacrifice."

Our Saviour has, in this also, given in his own example, an instance of the lawfulness and innocence of social intercourse and the pleasures of domestic friendship. He partook of entertainments, and did not refuse to mingle in social intercourse, even with publicans and sinners. He had his private and exclusive friendships. He loved and compassionated all mankind; but we are told of a family in Bethany whom he particularly favoured. He loved Mary, and her sister Martha, and Lazarus.

Friendship and social intercourse are the great cheerers and comforters of our existence. Shall we deprive the poor of this comfort? In cities, and in many situations in the country also, particularly in the case of domestic servants, the Sabbath is the only day when they are able to enjoy this pleasure. Would we, even if we could, be so cruel as to prevent this enjoyment? We can see our friends every day, but it is not so with them; they are tied to their laborious occupations; they can only see and converse with their friends on the Sunday. If we could prevent this, it would be to reduce them to a state worse than slavery.

This brings us back to consider the difference *in principle* between the Sabbath, as it was observed among the Jews, and the Lord's day, as it is, or ought to be observed among Christians. The principle of the former was simply *rest*—a cessation from

labour—and the reason annexed to the commandment was, that on that day God had rested from his work of creation. But the Lord's Day, or Christian Sabbath is in principle, and ought to be in fact a festival—a day of rejoicing—a day for the enjoyment of the pleasures of intellect, social love, and rational devotion ; and the reasons for observing it as such are —that on this day, God caused light to spring out of darkness—that on this day, He who is the light of the universe, returned from the darkness of the tomb —and that on this day, the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, descended to enlighten and to solace a benighted and sorrowful world. It is not mere rest, therefore, that is the duty of this day, but a change of occupation. It is a day for every active exertion for enlightening the minds of the young and uninformed, and for spreading as far as possible the light of divine truth. It is a day for the exercise of active benevolence--for refreshing the bodies, and comforting the hearts of the poor, and for diffusing among all ranks, the feelings of mutual love, and Christian charity.

OLD AGE.

Mr. Burke has quoted as an instance of the sublime, produced by a profusion of magnificent metaphor, the panegyric upon Simon the son of Onias the High Priest, in the book of the son of Sirach. A passage no way inferior to this in sublimity, and infinitely before it in interest and pathos, occurs in the last chapter of the last work of King Solomon, where he gives a description of old age.

I shall leave it to the moralist and divine to set forth the wisdom and the excellence of the advice which serves to introduce this description. I consider the passage merely in the light of a composition and one of the most exquisite pieces of poetry that is to be found in any language.

Age is first pointed out in the expression, "*the evil days—the years—when we shall say,—I have no pleasure in them.*"

In youth when the blood is yet warm, and the

spirits high, the simple consciousness of existence is attended with pleasure—a pleasure which is never duly appreciated till it is lost. When we first open our eyes upon the visible creation, and behold the sun shining in his strength, the moon walking in brightness, the stars and all the host of heaven, we regard them as things that are common, and are thankless for the blessing. But we shall learn to value them, when as age comes upon us they begin to wax dim ; when the blessed light of heaven itself seems to be obscured.

In youth as in the spring-time of life, sorrow takes no hold of the mind. As the short vernal shower is succeeded by the bright gleam of sunshine, and serves to give fresh beauties to the landscape; so the afflictions of youth are soon forgotten, and only give a more pleasing zest to the joys that are to follow. But age has few cheering gleams: afflictions then take a deeper root—they are heavier while they last, and not so easily removed. "*The clouds return after the rain.*"

How finely is the feeble and defenceless state of age alluded to in the expression,—"*In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble.*" The keepers of the house—those who are entrusted with its safety, the guards set to protect it from secret fraud, or open violence—they tremble. "*The strong men,*" the champions renowned for war, who

turned the battle from our gates, "*bow*"—submit themselves to the yoke.

"*The grinders cease because they are few, and they that look out at the windows are darkened.*" How poetical, how beautiful are these allusions to the infirmities which mark the decay of nature!

When those who labour at the mill are reduced to so small a number that their strength is no longer able to move it, they must cease. The sentinel ascends the watch-tower and looks forth, but all is darkness—no object is to be distinguished through the gloom.

There is much conveyed in the expression, "*the doors are shut in the streets.*" The bustle and business of the day in a large city—the most lively instance of human activity—is designated by the doors in the streets being open. Then is the time for meeting and transacting affairs—for buying and selling—for every trade pursuing its occupations—for visiting, feasting, and pastime. But now "the doors are shut in the streets;" business and bustle, and buying and selling, and hospitality and pleasure are all over. The late animated scene is desolate. A dead silence reigns as of the night; no work, nor device, nor wisdom remains.

We have another occurrence of the allusion to the mill, which, simple though it be, is in this instance highly affecting. "The busy mill" is a cheerful, an

interesting object, and connected in our minds with many pleasing associations. Its sound gladdens the village, and presents images of plenty, and prosperity, and happiness. But now the machine begins to fail—the motion flags. "*The sound of the grinding is low*," indicating that it is ere long to cease, and to be heard no more.

"*And he shall rise up at the voice of the bird.*" Nothing could so beautifully mark the imbecility of extreme old age, as the circumstances here chosen: as if it were said,—once he was unshaken amidst the shouts of battle, or the cries of multitudes—he heard unmoved the crash of thunder, or the threats of the enraged tyrant;—now, the slightest breath distresses, and disturbs, and terrifies him; "he rises up at the voice of the bird," which would not, in his youth, have broken his slightest slumber, or interrupted his most trivial occupation; he knows not what it is, and is afraid.

In the vigour of life—what so charming to the senses as the sight of youth, and health, and beauty, crowning the genial banquet, or uniting in the jocund dance? And when to these are joined the delights of poetry, and the enchantments of music, the fascination is complete. The whole soul is ravished; every sense and faculty is taken captive. Every capacity of enjoyment is filled to the brim—heaped up and running over. Now, sad reverse!

The banquet, the dance, and the song are fled—youth, and health, and beauty, and genius, are no more. "*All the daughters of music are brought low.*" The charm which surrounded them is gone. Their power is departed for ever.

The once fearless heart, which rejoiced to scale the lofty tower, or ascend the giddy precipice, or which tempted the still more dangerous heights of ambition, is now "*afraid of that which is high.*" The adventurous spirit which once faced all the horrors of the desert, or braved the stormy deep, is now unable to undertake a Sabbath day's journey. "*Fears are in the way.*" To cross a trifling rill, or step over a stone, are matters of difficulty and danger.

"*The almond tree shall flourish.*" Those who have seen the blossoms of the almond tree, hanging like long lines of silver, will at once see the beauty of this allusion to the hoary head of age. The sacred poet uses no vague, common, or imperfect similes. When his figures are examined closely, it is perceived that their minute propriety is not less remarkable than their extraordinary beauty.

It might appear that nothing could present us with so affecting a picture of that extreme debility which awaits man in his latter days than the expression, "*The grasshopper shall be a burden.*" But the inspired penman has carried the climax still far-

ther. Long after every enjoyment and even every comfort is gone, we continue to cling to this miserable existence. We still cast a "lingering longing look" on the world we are about to quit; it still attracts a portion of our regards, our hopes and fears, our wishes and our desires. But even these at last leave us: "*And desire shall fail.*" The last tie that binds us to this state of existence is broken. We cease to regard the world and its concerns with interest. The desire of life, the last feeling of the heart, becomes extinct. Man submits to unavoidable fate, and resigns his body to the dust from whence it was originally taken.

The images which are employed to paint the concluding scene of this tragedy—the separation of the etherial soul from its frail tenement of clay—are, in the highest degree, bold and poetical: "*Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken.*" How beautifully is represented, under these similitudes, the end of all that is great and noble—the ruin of God's chiefest work—the apparent extinction of that being who was created in the image of his Maker, placed a little lower than the angels, and crowned with glory and honour!

Man is elsewhere likened to the grass of the field—to the flower that cometh forth and is cut down and withereth. This simile, however beautiful, and in some respects just, is hardly consistent with the

dignity of our nature, and the immortality which awaits us in another state. But the silver cord and the golden bowl, afford many images of all that is excellent and durable in material objects ; and though the one is for a time loosed, and the other broken, the power which at first called them into existence, is able to repair their unsightly breaches, and to make them appear again in more than their pristine splendour.

The next images presented to us by the inspired writer, not only afford another instance of the minute propriety of his figures, but exhibit a knowledge of the true constitution of the human frame, of which no vestige is to be found in the most enlightened nations of antiquity, and which the pride of modern philosophy has claimed as exclusively her own. Could the fact of the circulation of the blood be alluded to in more unequivocal language than in the words, "*or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern?*"

These images of the last triumph of the king of terrors, are very affecting. Though simple, they convey volumes. They set before us the humbling—the heart-breaking spectacle of mortality. This is the struggle at which nature shudders, and the stoutest heart is appalled. The soul is now treading the valley of the shadow of death, unconscious of the weeping relatives who surround the bed upon which

the almost lifeless body is extended, and before the awful veil is rent which separates her from the world of spirits. The last sigh now hovers on the lips. The feeble pulse is extended to perform its last beat.

And now it is over: the body, that masterpiece of workmanship—in form and moving so express and admirable—is now reduced to a lump of lifeless clay, and numbered with the clods of the valley.

But we are not left to the exclusive contemplation of this mournful side of the picture. The last image presented to us is one of hope and joy. "*The spirit shall return to God who gave it.*" The spirit—the animating principle, the living, thinking, sensible soul—is not dead. It cannot die. It survives in another state; and it is only removed from this transitory life to one which has no end.

After all its toils and wanderings, it has returned to its proper and final home—to its first, best, only friend, Creator, Saviour, Comforter—"Lord! to whom would we desire to go but unto thee!"—to love and to enjoy Him for ever.

CONSOLATION.

" Blessed are ye that mourn now, for ye shall be comforted."

It is in seasons of affliction, when earthly blessings fail us, that we feel most firmly and surely the comforts and hopes of the Gospel.

When the sun shines, our view is limited to objects, and of these but a few on the surface of the earth ; but when his beams are withdrawn, our eyes are opened to the far higher glories of the firmament. So when the delusive sunshine of prosperity is removed, which bounded our view to "the world," the eyes of our moral nature are endued with a clearer perception, and there is opened to us a full prospect of the great realities of heaven.

We formerly *believed*, but now we *see* and *know*: and by the blessing of God, and comfort of his holy

word, we are enabled to embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life.

"Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord." For such we need not weep. They may grieve for us, exposed to the evils, the distresses, the dangers, and the sins incident to humanity; but why should we grieve for them? They are far removed from all these evils. They are in bliss. They are in safety. They are in heaven. They are not dead. Our God is not a God of the dead, but of the living.

They are but gone upon a journey, whither we shall soon follow them. They have arrived at the place of their rest. We are still sojourning in the wilderness of this world, surrounded with many perils which they have escaped.

It was said by a wise heathen, that "no one can be pronounced happy till his death." The truth of the saying will be acknowledged by the Christian, but in a higher sense than that in which it was originally applied. Those who have passed through this world unstained by its allurements, unpolluted by its vices—who are now safe from all its toils and its snares, are happy, thrice happy. What is there worth desiring in the world for ourselves, but that we also may die the death of the righteous, and that our last end may be like his?

"Whom the gods love die young," was the saying of another heathen. The thought is beautiful,

and is only not a Christian sentiment, because what Christianity teaches is universal, not conditional resignation. The consolations of the Christian are confined to no age or circumstance. Our God and Saviour loves all his children, the old and the young together; and whatever time he calls them, that is the best. It is the best for them who are taken away, and the best for us who remain. Was he whom we lament kind, gentle, and affectionate, free from the stains of vice, and firm in the possession of his faith? All this, which, to the natural mind, might tend to increase our grief, will, if viewed aright, prove our highest consolation. It is, in such cases, that we may most fitly comfort one another with these words: "That we sorrow not as those which have no hope;" knowing that "they which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."

The body—yes, the body, which we saw, erewhile consigned to the dust, will rise again in glory. This is no vain speculation. We have for it the eternal, unerring word of Him who cannot lie. "It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body!"

What is the brightest prospect which this world can afford compared to this?

It is a fearful and a dangerous thing to receive

our good things in this world. We have it on the highest authority that it is not easy for a rich man to escape the snares by which he is environed. He is in the toils. The world, and the things of the world, have hold of him, and keep him from fixing his regards on that which is alone needful.

It is in mercy that God sends afflictions—that he takes away, one by one, all our earthly comforts. It is to shut us up to himself—the only true comfort—the source of all. It is in affliction that we feel most firmly—and without it, we can hardly feel at all—that "God is our refuge and our strength," "our confidence and our hope, and the horn of our salvation, and our high tower." All require to be purified by affliction; all the great and the good that we have ever heard of *have* been so purified.

When the beloved disciple saw in the Spirit that great multitude which no man could number, the redeemed of God, out of every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, he was told—"these are they which have come out of great tribulation."

Who would not endure the chastening of the Lord, when we know it to be a proof of his love? As the brave man "out of the nettle danger plucks the flower safety," so the Christian is taught, out of all apparent evil, to extract the highest good.

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